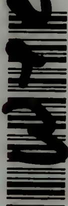
WEST OF THE WATER TOWER


West of the water tower.
7024
Newton Town Library 563-9283

Mrs. H. S. Dow
306 N. Holland
Danville
Ill

To "Dowsie"
from.

Nell Mann Shedd.

Aug 1st 1923

Enroute to Butte & [illegible]

West of the Water Tower

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WEST OF THE WATER TOWER

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CHAPTER I

IT was a big evening at the First Christian Church in Junction City. Horses were hitched from one end of the racks to the other, tied there by the farmers who had driven in for the great occasion. Automobiles, belonging to the townspeople and to the more prosperous farmers, lined Buchanan Street clear to the harness shop; a few, even, were around on the street toward the jail.

Outside the church were the loafers, as it was practically the only place in town where anything was going on this evening. Many of them had come from the Pastime Pool Hall, which was their usual roosting place, and now stood on the sidewalk or sat on the edge of the steps leading up to the church, where they talked until a group got out of an automobile, or a farmer helped his family down from a spring wagon and started into the church. As the people passed, one of the wits would lead off with a comment; then others would take it up. Soon the simple passing of a family became quite humorous, especially if one of those who passed happened to be a girl.

Inside, the assembling people walked with hastened steps, as the aisle sloped abruptly toward the ros-

trum. There was an air of suspense, a flutter of excitement. The church was hot and stuffy. The janitor moved about with his long pole; windows went up and came down as the pole scraped against the leaded glass. People were fanning themselves; there was an almost continuous *swish-swish* and sometimes a rasp, as the more old-fashioned women with palm leaves rattled them against their clothing. The section of the seats which curved around the platform had been set aside with blue ribbons. From time to time one of the girl ushers would say to a man and wife hesitating in the aisle, "Oh, I know where you belong," and lead them to the section guarded by ribbons. A ribbon would be lifted and the privileged couple would move inside, for it was graduation night of the Junction City High School, and the seats thus reserved were for the parents of the graduates.

The organist came out with slow and solemn step. Sitting down on the bench, he wiggled about until he found a position which satisfied him, and then, tossing his handkerchief aside, raised his hands. They came down. There were a rumble of wheels, the rush of air, a slight wheezing, and sound filled the church. The door of the Sunday-school room opened and twenty-two students came marching in in proper and orderly rows. As the organ roared and echoed they took their places, girls first, while the parents edged forward.

One of the boys was Guy Plummer. Guy was nineteen, which made him older than the other boys in the class. The reason was that his father, the Rev. Adrian Plummer, was a preacher and had been

moved from place to place as his "calls" had come until Guy was a year or two behind the other boys of his age. But he was the smartest boy in the class, although not its valedictorian. This honor had gone to a pale-faced, big-eyed boy who had few interests outside the prescribed courses of study. Guy was the best debater in school, and when there had been a state fair at Sedalia his essay on "Government—What Is It?" had been chosen by the superintendent of the high school as part of the Junction City educational exhibit, and when it had been displayed at the fair it had won first place in the state. The school board had then issued the essay in printed form and had put the original manuscript in the school's archives. Guy had led the debating team against St. Joseph and against Kansas City and had even gone to Omaha, when it had won the Missouri Valley championship. But that was nothing. To-night he was going to spread himself as never before. He was to deliver an oration on "Abraham Lincoln—the Man." He was going to give it fire, sweep the people off their feet. Abraham Lincoln was his great hero; he had lived Lincoln and thought Lincoln for weeks. He could hardly wait until it was time to deliver his address. But, tense and excited as he was, with a slight perspiration in his palms, his eyes swung to the opposite end of the front line to fall on Bee Chew. She was the prettiest girl in the class and the general favorite. Guy looked at the manner in which her hair rose over her ears, how it fell about her neck, and he caught glimpses of the faint outlines of a ribbon beneath her waist.

Bee's father was Charles G. Chew, the ablest

lawyer in town and its richest citizen. Bee was set off from the less fortunate girls. Her mother was dead and she was her father's constant companion. She traveled with him, had been to St. Louis many times, and had even been to New York. Guy had never been even to Kansas City but once, and that was when he had gone to debate. Bee had a trap of her own, with open top and wickerwork sides, and drove it jauntily about Junction City. When Guy saw her proudly holding the lines, as she went bouncing along the street, she seemed far above him. Never in his life had he been in such a rig; his own father, as he went his ministerial rounds, drove a rattly old buggy with the whip so bent and warped that it touched Prince's back. Even to talk to Bee Chew was something of an adventure for Guy.

When the Plummers came to Junction City, Guy accepted his lowly position without a qualm. He had never known anything else; his family was not the kind that could fly high. When he met Bee on the street he lifted his hat, mumbled words in passing, and confined himself to his books. And then something very surprising had happened in school.

One session the two were in the same chemistry class, and by chance worked across the same laboratory table from each other. Day after day he saw her, with her rubber apron and paper cuffs, but, through some feeling of inferiority, made no advances. Then one day there was a crash and she screamed. She had picked up a hot test tube. Running to the medicine cabinet, he applied first aid, and as he worked at the bandages it suddenly occurred to him that he was holding Bee's hand.

It made him tremble. For several days he found courage to ask about her hand, and she replied most appreciatively; after the hand was well there were other things to talk of.

That was during the winter. And when Bee entertained the senior class in her home Guy had gone to the large house on Buchanan Street in awe. Many times, in passing, he had looked at the house with the slate roof, and at the curious patterns worked out in the blue and white tile. It was the only house in Junction City—in fact, the only house Guy had ever seen in his life—with a slate roof. Sometimes the *Banner* referred to it as a "mansion" —and on such occasions Charles G. Chew had a good laugh. It seemed marvelous to Guy, on the night Bee entertained her class, that he should feel so perfectly at home in the great rooms. He had even put his hand on the piano and laughed at the perspiration marks it made. And then during the evening, when the girls had to choose partners, Bee had openly selected him. It made his head swim.

Now, as he looked at the hair rising in a long wave over her ears, he felt a renewed determination to do his best. He would deliver an oration that would make her proud of him. He glanced down at the flower she had pinned in his buttonhole.

"I just know you are going to make an awfully big hit," she had said.

Again the door from the Sunday school opened and there was a stir as Charles G. Chew came in. He was shorter than the average man, with distinguished gray hair, without any attempt at parting. It was cut straight across his forehead in what

was called "bangs." It served to make him an individual figure. The superintendent guided him across the platform and indicated for him the seat of honor. Chew bowed and smiled at the students with the freedom of one accustomed to appearing before audiences, and then sat down and flopped one leg across the other at ease. He turned to seek out Bee. There was a rare companionship between them. His eye caught Bee's and moved in a huge and unabashed wink of recognition. Bee blushed. There was no other person in Junction City who would dare appear on a public platform and commit such a breach of etiquette. But it meant nothing to Chew. His eyes traveled over the church, resting on the different emblems of faith. The stained-glass windows of the shepherds, and figures with halos, brought a quick-vanishing smile, for he was an atheist and accepted no common canons. It was the first time in years he had been in church, and it was only the graduation of his daughter which had brought him there now. He was a follower of Ingersoll and could repeat many of the fiery passages from memory. Even in his court cases he liked to bring in references to "the great and mighty Ingersoll," and "to that misunderstood humanitarian with the silvery tongue," and "to the simple man who died as he had lived." This was a reference to the belief, which was abroad in Junction City, that Ingersoll on his deathbed had, when he knew that his last hours were upon him, called for a minister and died with the comfort of the Church. Chew never lost occasion to refute this, but in it all he was able to praise the atheist leader in such a way that

even the most devout members of the jury could feel no resentment. Late hours of the night he would read *The Age of Reason*, *The Mistakes of Moses*, and *The Descent of Man*, the light shining undimmed through the planting of trees which filled his yard. People returning from church hurried on by. But if any loss of practice resulted from his decided views, it was not perceptible. It was known that if he did not believe in the integrity of a client and in the honesty of a case, he would refuse it. It marked him out sharply.

The brass knob of the door to the Sunday-school room again turned, clicked on the release, and the door slowly opened. A tall, gaunt figure with a long, black, flapping coat entered and moved across the platform. Under his arm was clutched a worn bible of limp leather. Below his ears, on each side, was a growth of long whiskers, now turning gray, of the variety known in Junction City as "burnsides." The man moved jerkily across the platform and the superintendent waved him to a seat with less concern than he had shown Chew. The tall, gaunt, high-shouldered man accepted the seat and got quietly down on the floor on his knees and buried his face in his hands. Thus he knelt for some time, then rose abruptly and seemed to be conscious of the people for the first time. The man was Guy's father.

As Adrian Plummer rose again, with the marks of the chair still on his forehead, he saw Chew. There was a brief moment of surprise, as if some faint hope mounted in him that, after all, the lawyer had seen the error of his ways, but the amused glances of Chew were soon apparent. Instead of coming to the

house of God in humiliation and reverence, he had come to scoff. Plummer had watched Chew's widening sphere of influence, first with a vague fear, then with growing apprehension. The new generation was all too free to talk lightly, to think lightly; in young people there was no longer a deep and abiding faith; doubt and criticism were creeping into the schools, and now an open and acknowledged leader of agnosticism was chairman of the school board. Adrian Plummer's hand moved uneasily on his bible.

The superintendent trotted about, moving chairs, bending over to whisper to one student after another, filling the water pitcher, arranging the class banner so that it would more nobly display itself.

"Now we will have the invocation," he piped.

Guy saw his father rise to his gaunt height, shut his eyes under his great, shaggy brows and turn his face to heaven. There was a rustle of people moving, books sliding to the floor, the sound of the palm-leaf fans as they were put aside. Immovable, Adrian Plummer waited until there was silence and then his voice rolled out over the audience, and as he proceeded his hands rose in supplication. Might God look down upon this little gathering which had assembled in His name, and might not His great blessing fall upon these young people who stand at the threshold ready to start upon the journey of life. There was feeling in it, the power of earnestness, but Guy had heard such appeals many times before. He lifted his head enough to see the uncouth posture of his father; one sleeve had fallen down and had left exposed one of the round celluloid cuffs which his

father wore. There was a blackened place under the imitation gold button. Guy felt an uneasy stirring. Never would his father pay any attention to his clothes, and to Guy clothes meant so much. It was only of recent years that his father wore cuffs at all, and unless Guy's mother washed them with soap and water before appearing in public they knew nothing at all of cleansing. Plummer's life was too full of matters of the soul to spend time on the intricacies of dress.

Guy glanced out of the corner of his eye. What if Bee should see? But her eyes were safely lowered and Guy breathed more freely. And then suddenly Guy became conscious of something new in his father's appeal. His father was praying for compassion and forgiveness upon those who scoff, upon those who doubt, and upon those of so little faith that they cannot lift their eyes above small doubts and petty criticisms of the God of the myriad universe. And then Guy knew that his father was calling upon Chew to have faith. A greater passion came into his voice, and in his earnestness he half turned in Chew's direction. His long, bony hand clutched the bible until it bent into a red roll. His voice rose higher, trembled, and he swallowed in his eagerness. Guy saw Chew standing with his head unbowed, the same vague smile on his lips, turn in surprise in the direction of his father. The pleading was too evident. And now Guy saw the people in the audience raise their eyes, first secretly, then openly, while his father's hand was still lifted in supplication. Guy felt a tense, hot moment, and then the shadowy smile on Chew's face returned.

"Amen, amen!" called his father, and sat down.

The program began. They went through the class song, and then the superintendent, going to the brass railing at the edge of the platform, smiled out over the audience and introduced the valedictorian. The pale boy with the big, serious eyes stood up. There was a stir of anticipation, and the young student, taking three steps forward, looked for a moment over the heads of the audience at some invisible point behind them, as he had been instructed, and began. It was soon over. Bee was introduced. She was to read the class prophecy. Charles G. Chew was now all attention, his feet properly on the floor, and on his face was a bright, expectant look. Guy breathed quickly, and suddenly felt an intense excitement. But his concern was unnecessary. After a moment Bee was at home and read easily and naturally. There was about her something of her father's composure before an audience. As each name was announced there was a laugh, while the other members of the class turned to stare at the marked one with suppressed appreciation. It was clever and was, after the soberness of the valedictory, most welcome.

At last Guy's name was announced, and with a queer combination of fear and elation running through him he stepped forward. There was an awkward silence, a stirring of some suddenly necessary muscles in his throat, and then he heard a queer, unknown person speaking. But in a moment the tense, constrained feeling was gone. His arm became his own, muscles were no longer in his throat and in him was a quick, sure feeling of confidence.

Chew sat swinging his foot, the same slight smile on his face. Many times he had heard amateur orations; possibly they brought back his own early days, but soon his foot stopped its ceaseless swinging and found a place on the floor. He sat forward in his chair; surprise rose to his face. Guy was no longer conscious of his audience; he was drawing the picture of Lincoln which his days of living with him and thinking his thoughts made possible. He forgot about his gestures, which had been a matter of so much concern, and now was deep in his subject. The palm-leaf fans no longer moved, no one stole softly down the aisle, the organist deserted his bench for a chair.

As Adrian Plummer listened to Guy a light rose in his eyes; his fingers moved over the palms of his hands, a smile came to the corners of his mouth, but they were not his only signs of emotion. Between him and Guy there was always the most formal of words. Never any endearments, but now there was a quick, pleasant beating of the heart. Guy was his only child. God had given him a son—a son to carry on his work.

Guy finished. There was a quick, sudden burst of applause, and as he walked to his seat he saw that Chew, half rising from his chair, was applauding loudly. Even after Guy had sat down he knew that Chew had turned in his seat to face him. Guy felt a deep, calm sense of elation. His oration had been the success of the evening.

At last the program was over and Charles G. Chew stepped forward, his hands in his pockets. There was an easy unconventionality about him, a winning presence. He called Guy "our young

orator," but it was complimentary. The superintendent fluttered about, anxious that some of the credit might be his, but Chew spoke only of Guy; fans rattled and the audience gave forth its appreciation. Turning with quiet, piercing humor he began to batter the shafts which Plummer had aimed at him. He spoke of the freedom of the mind, turned some of Guy's own words to his credit, quoted Lincoln. The audience smiled at his lightness, won by his geniality. Adrian Plummer sat with his gaunt face turned upon Chew, his hand gripping his Bible. At last Chew distributed the diplomas, handing out the rolls tied with blue ribbons, with amusing comments of his own. The organist slid onto his bench, wiggled himself into position, and the organ began to reverberate, first one gilded pipe, then another. Fathers and mothers rose from their section and came forward; greetings were passed, laughter rose, flowers were exchanged by the students to be pressed in books and kept always; hands reached out to congratulate Guy, while the pale-faced valedictorian stood idly pushing his roll back and forth through his fingers.

Adrian Plummer began to edge through the laughing, excited crowd to stand by Guy's side while he received his congratulations. He had sacrified for Guy—it had been difficult to keep him in school—and now this was Guy's first triumph. In the fall, Guy would go away to the state university, and then there would be other triumphs. But such thoughts were not shown in Adrian Plummer's face; it was sober and unmoving, but as he edged forward a proud light played in his eyes. His progress, how-

ever, was delayed. Some one came to speak to him; after a moment he again started on. Then abruptly his head lifted and his fingers gripped. Guy had escaped from the crowd and was being led across the platform by Chew, who was not only talking to him, but patting him on the back.

Then Bee joined them and the three disappeared into the Sunday-school room, laughing.

At last Plummer marched out, his lips set, his bible clutched under his arm.

CHAPTER II

THE next morning when Guy awoke, his father was calling him from the foot of the stairs.

"Guy! Guy! You hear me?"

Adrian Plummer arose each morning at six, for the influence of his early days on the farm was still upon him. Then he had arisen at five, performed the chores, curried, watered, and fed the horses, and gone with them into the fields; now lying till six seemed the height of luxury.

Guy gave no answer; it seemed impossible to free himself from the pleasant bonds of slumber. There was the sound of a foot on the stairs and the tangle of his father's gray and black hair rose above the level of the floor; then his burnsides. But before his father could actually gain the top step Guy managed to get one foot on the floor. This was an unspoken agreement that if Guy was up his father should take no further action. The burnsides went out of sight, the grizzled head disappeared, and Guy, with one leg dangling over the side of the bed, sank back. After the glories of the night before, it seemed impossible to come back to the realities of six o'clock. The latch to the stair door rattled and Guy picked up his shoe and dropped it. This was a further signal that he was stirring. Again aroused to activity, Guy looked along the floor for his socks; each morning he resolved that that night he would hang them on the

foot of the bed, but when morning came again the search must be made anew.

His graduation suit was hanging on the back of a chair; the uprights had so lifted the shoulders as to give it a grotesque appearance. Lifting the percale curtains in the corner, which, fastened to the walls by rods, served as a protection for his clothes, he brought out his everyday suit and, taking his suspenders from his graduation trousers, returned them to his work clothes. Then sitting down on a chair, he edged his legs into the dark chasms. In doing so his eye fell on the flower in the buttonhole of his graduation coat, and, gathering his trousers about his waist, he moved over to it and kissed it. He stopped to look at himself in the mirror over a "chiffonier" which served as his dressing table. A crack ran diagonally across the looking-glass until it reached the corner, where a little triangle was missing. When the mirror had become cracked it had been deemed unfit for downstairs and had been removed to Guy's room. There was a better one in the spare bedroom, which made the one other room on the second floor. The door of the spare room was kept closed and the blinds drawn. On the rare occasions when company came, Guy's mother would rush into the room ahead of the visitor, throw up the windows, and then signal Guy to slip downstairs and fill the blue-flowered porcelain pitcher which stood in the hand bowl. On the wall also was a huge round peacock fan, hanging by a leather support; its brilliant spots of color seeming to stand out like eyes. On the occasions when the presiding elder, or one of the Church officials from that con-

ference district, came for a meal, Mrs. Plummer would get it out and solemnly shake it over the table for any lagging flies. Sometimes Guy stole into the room to study, but always it seemed to him that he was away from home.

Going downstairs, Guy passed into the kitchen and, taking the washpan from its nail on the wall, placed it in the sink, which had once been blue, but was now chipped and rusted, and turned on the water. His mother, with her back to him, was bending over, seeking to regulate the flame of the coal oil stove; the round yellow blaze with its blue tip could be seen through the isinglass. There was no word of greeting between Guy and his mother. In the Plummer home this was not considered necessary, but soon after meeting of a morning some casual word was exchanged which served as an acknowledgment of the other's presence. Mrs. Plummer rose with the blackened match in her hand and deposited it in a tin can on the shelf. When the can was full it would be emptied in the wood box in the cellar and, in the winter, used as kindling.

"Here is some warm water, if you want any," said Mrs. Plummer, and as Guy offered no protest she brought the teakettle and poured some of it into the wash pan. Then she went lumbering across the floor. Mrs. Plummer was a large, heavy woman, and when she walked there was always a slight jarring of the windows.

Her father had been a "renter." He moved from one farm to another, always confident that the change would bring him "luck." But with his run-down teams, poor plows, and rusted farm implements, he

was never successful with his crop; the 1st of March would see him again packing the household things in an unpainted wagon and setting off for another farm. There was a large family, and when the youngest girl met Adrian Plummer and he began to "pay attention" to her she was most proud; Plummer was then on his second church "call," and to be sought out by an "educated" man was a mark of distinction. Her father sold one of the calves, which he could ill afford, and bought her clothes. When finally she married Adrian Plummer it was looked upon as a brilliant match. None of her sisters had married, or had hope of marrying, a man who did not have to work with his hands. Her friends had thrown together and gone to a woman in a remote section, who still knew the art of feather working, and had hired her to make a peacock fan. It was to be a beautiful ornament, and at the same time an object of service, to hang in her new city home. But matters had not gone so well as the bride had thought; although her husband had risen, hers had not been the life of ease and respect which she had expected.

"I'll put on a clean towel," said Mrs. Plummer, without addressing Guy directly, and waddled across to the roller on the back of the door. As she returned there was a slight jarring; then the sound of skillets and pans being moved.

"I've set the things on," she called at last.

The three came into the dining room. On the walls were the pictures which Mrs. Plummer thought "choice." One was a reproduction of an oil painting of three dead ducks hanging on a board wall, just

above a knot hole, while another was a print of a fruit basket with ornate peaches, pears, and grapes half spilled out of it, with a blue ribbon tied on the handle. On the walls, in addition, were the Bible pictures, one of Christ walking on the waters with a halo over His head, and others, all collected by Adrian Plummer. Slantwise across the corner was a china cupboard, with dishes of many shades and colors, the gifts of different showers, donations, and surprises from former congregations.

Guy took his accustomed place across from his mother. His father sat still and upright until all was quiet, then suddenly bent over his plate. How many times Guy had heard him say grace and always in the same way. Guy knew that after a word or two his father would have to stop and clear his throat; he did so now, and then went on again in a higher key. "In the name of Christ. our Redeemer, we ask it," he finally concluded.

There was the clink of dishes being passed, the rattle of knives and forks.

"Guy was good last night," said Mrs. Plummer at last. "Don't you think so, Pa?"

She always began thus, as if in some way gaining Plummer's consent.

"Yes," Plummer answered, abruptly.

"I like to hear good speaking. I don't mean oratory, but things with sense in them." Now she addressed herself directly to Guy. "I thought you was better than the valedictorian. I saw Mrs. Arnhalt, Mrs. Thompson, and all the women looking at you. I wish my folks could have been here."

Mrs. Plummer continued to talk—what the women

had worn, what they had said, which ones had come in late, but always she returned to Guy. She watched to see what he wanted, poured him a tumbler of milk from a blue-tinted glass pitcher with hard round incrustations on it and which she considered very handsome. She was elated. During the day she would put on her best dress and go down to the different stores, passing from one to another, to receive the congratulations of the other women.

"It seems to me that if they printed that government essay in a book, they ought to this one, too," she said.

She turned to Adrian Plummer, but he made no comment.

"Was your egg too hard?" she asked, anxiously, of Guy, and Guy noticed it for the first time; it was satisfactory. Again he began mechanically to eat, his thoughts flying off pleasantly.

Adrian Plummer said little; ate with his eyes on his plate, from time to time raising them to see if all were supplied with bread; then again lowered them.

At last Mrs. Plummer began to stack up the dishes without leaving her seat, scraping the remains of the food into a single dish, draining all the coffee cups into one, and swishing water from one of the drinking glasses around in them. Breakfast was over.

Guy was moving away, when he had a queer feeling that his father was going to speak to him; there was an exchange of glances.

"Guy," said Plummer, "I want to see you in the 'study' a moment."

Guy's heart beat rapidly; he felt that something ominous was about to happen.

His father led the way to the "study." This was an ell of the house, and here it was that Adrian Plummer prepared his sermons. In it was a desk which he had bought at a second-hand store, and on it was an oil lamp with a large blue bowl; supported by wires on the chimney was a red shade; the wires had become twisted and in one place the shade was scorched. When Adrian Plummer had to work at night he used this lamp, as he could not quite accustom himself to electricity. Electric light hurt his eyes, he said. When sitting at his desk writing his sermons he took off his shoes, for his feet never quite grew accustomed to the hardness of the streets; sometimes he would rise and pace slowly up and down the room, or stop suddenly and pound the heavy gilt bible and shout out a fiery utterance.

"I suppose you will think I am a crank," his father said, as he seated himself. "That is one of the privileges of youth, but I have lived longer than you have. I have watched a good many people in their progress through the world and I have seen what has happened to them. It is bad association that is worst of all. The great lesson of the prodigal son is that he associated with the wrong people. It is not the husks alone that people get; it is something more destructive—wrong ideas. I wanted to walk home with you last night, Guy, and when I turned you were going off without even a look in my direction. Sometimes people come to holy places to scoff, and they may scoff awhile—but the day comes when they will surely fall down before their God." He continued, his eyes fixed on Guy, his voice filled with emotion. "And, oh, the sorrow and wailing of that

day! It is all told in the Book. If any doubts ever arise in your mind, won't you come to me, Guy? Doubt and suspicion and the poisoning of the mind of the young are becoming so common these days." Plummer looked off into the distance, seeing a vision of chaos; then his throat moved and his fingers tightened with a quick, tense determination. Suddenly at times, when he seemed engulfed, this feeling of fresh courage came to him and again he went out into his battle. "I don't want to be severe," he said, and his great, heavy muscles moved; "I just want you to think things out for yourself. . . . You really made a wonderful speech last night."

It was the first direct compliment he had ever paid Guy; and now, after his talk, he felt a rising lightness of spirit. Guy was his wonder son, and during these minutes in "the study" he felt that they had come together, that there had been an understanding. He had told Guy all he wished and Guy had taken it without protest. The fear which had gripped him the night before had been conquered, set aside. He went briskly down the wooden walk to the barn, whistling. His last congregation, before coming to Junction City, had given him a horse and buggy in appreciation of his work, and now Prince was his special care and delight. He took off his coat and hung it on a harness arm. His sleeves were kept in place by a pair of elaborately flowered holders. During his long and poverty-stricken days on the farm he had admired them much, and now that he could afford them he wore them constantly. But Guy hated the sight of them; no other man in Junction City wore such old-fashined things.

Plummer began currying Prince. *Rap-rap-rap* went the comb on the boardings of the stall. He stopped his whistling suddenly to slap Prince on the shoulder. "Good old boy!" he said, "Good old boy!"

Prince turned to look at him in surprise.

Guy came out of "the study" with relief; after all, there had been nothing to that ominous feeling which had gripped him. His father had meant Chew, but there was nothing to what he said. He was perfectly able to take care of himself, he thought. He was a thinker; he had ideas; he knew what was what.

When he went downtown he felt that the eyes of the world were upon him. The road of life seemed to lie so straight and direct ahead of him. It would be easy to conquer. And as he walked he moved with a flourish; he looked upon those he passed, and who had not risen so high as his expectations carried him, as being of little consequence. He saw a man beginning to turn bald; he would never accomplish anything. People stopped Guy, called across the street, went out of their way, to speak to him. He answered buoyantly, and when a woman greeted him he took off his hat with a grand air. How different was his father. On meeting a woman his father made a wide, uncertain gesture of his hand, as if he might be greeting another man, and then ended by bringing his fingers to the brim of his hat in a begrudging compromise. How he had improved on his father; and at times he felt a bit ashamed of him. His father had none of the graces, and it took these to be a gentleman, so Guy thought. It was most important that the hat should be removed in the proper manner.

Guy went to the Carnegie Free Library and strode with a busy air to the reference room and got down Bryce's *American Commonwealth* with an air of absorption, but in a moment he was glancing over the top of the book to see if anyone was looking. He turned through the magazines, stopped to gaze at the weather chart in its metal holder, and for a moment studied the curious isothermic lines as if arriving at some profound conclusion. The prediction was a day old. There was a steel engraving of Lincoln on the wall; he paused under it, stared attentively, moved his head from side to side with the air of an authority passing on details too finely drawn for the less skilled to appreciate. Finally he went out, and felt, as he walked down the street, that the people in the Library were looking out the window and following his progress with admiration. He began to whistle, flung his arms, tilted his hat onto the side of his head, snapped it back into place again. The colored janitor was washing down the windows of the First National Bank with a long pole on the end of which was a rubber swab. Leaning the dripping stick against the wall, he came forward, wiping his hand on his trousers.

"I hears you just about push up that ole roof last night with your or'tory. I guess I got to go around and look and see if it ain't goin' to let the rain in or somethin'. Mebbe I can get me a job followin' along behind you fixin' up roofs."

The colored man's laugh, high and cackling, sounded down the street. He was still chuckling when again he took up the swab.

Guy moved away, smiling. It was a procession of

triumph. It seemed to him that the whole world must know of his success. But at last the tour came to an end. He turned into the Owl Drug Store.

For some months, after hours, he had been working in the store; the knowledge of chemistry gained in his class was a help to him, and he had agreed that when he graduated he would put in full time. He was to get fifty-two dollars a month, and the money was to help pay his expenses at the state university. But now, as he walked behind the mirror which served as a partition at the end of the store, he wished that he had not promised to come to the store at once. The world outside was too wonderful, life was too alluring, the road was too glamorous, to be shut in by a few bottles. But soon September would come.

Wolf, the proprietor, came toward him in a white coat and wearing a black skullcap, looking at him over the top of his thick glasses.

"I hear you do goot py yourself," he said. "I shake mit you."

It was flattering to have such appreciation. People passing along the street suddenly turned in their course and came in; others waved genially; people at the soda fountain came up to say a word before going out.

At last Guy was free until after supper, and putting on his coat, he walked down the street. Junction City rose before him. It was a "farming town," one of the hundreds which have sprung up on what was once the "sweeping prairie." It was only seventy years old. At first a few wooden cabins served as a trading post for the westward-moving

Indians; in those days rough men went about with guns in the hollow of their arms, their crafty eyes out for chuck-a-luck. Then they went on farther west and the ox teams from Indiana, Ohio, and Kentucky, with a wife in front and a coop of chickens behind, came in. They settled upon the rich, black, deep soil, planted their treasured seed corn, wheat, and small grain, and now the third generation was coming along. Once these farmers came to town early of a morning, chucking and rattling along in their heavy wagons, stopping now and then to punch the mud from the wheels, but now they came of an afternoon, did their "trading," and were able to get home in time for supper. The automobile had changed the course of their lives. And now, as Guy walked along, an irregular line of automobiles was standing in the middle of the street, where once ox teams switched their tails and fought flies. In the middle of the street, on the four corners surrounding "the square," were barrels filled with cement, and in them were iron standards which said, "Go slowly," "Keep to the Right," and strung around the barrels were painted signs of home-made construction which said, "No Jay Walking Allowed."

Unconsciously Guy moved in the direction of the Pastime Pool Hall. It was the most glamorous spot in town; there was always something "going on," a welcome relief from his home. Across the front were blue blinds which in themselves were mysterious and alluring. Instead of lowering from the top they were raised from the bottom and held in place halfway up by cords fastened over rollers. The blinds were now faded, and in places holes had

been punched through by too eager thumbs. Occasionally the windows were washed. Inside could be heard the click of balls, the shaking of dice in a leather cup, the clink of money in a machine of chance as the coin bumped against well-calculated pegs. If the nickel came out at a certain place one was entitled to three cigars; if it did not the excitement was over.

When Guy entered there was a pleasant, stimulating hubbub going on. Even though it was mid-afternoon, the lights over the table were turned on; they cut blue cones through the smoke. On the walls were pictures from the *Police Gazette* of almost naked girls, and "art poses" which, the companies made a point of explaining, came through the mail in plain wrappers. Fastened on the wall by brass thumb tacks were post cards showing women with scant clothes, holding bouquets of flowers. They were known as "French pictures." There were also "comic pictures." One showed a blind man sitting on the curb, holding out his little tin cup, when an impossibly twisted girl came along and, pausing in front of him, found it necessary to arrange the garter on her stocking. The man was shown peering humorously over his colored glasses

"Cod" Dugan, the proprietor, was behind the cigar counter, selling chances on a peg board. Cod's teeth were bad and his breath smelled from many cigarettes, and from much whisky and cloves. He also ate a great deal of coffee, carrying it in the watch pocket of his trousers. In would go his fat forefinger and thumb and out would come a bean; there would be a flash of gold teeth and then a slight crunch.

Once in a while, when he threw back his head in a huge roaring laugh, one could see broken bits on the end of his tongue. Sometimes, when the particles became lodged between his teeth, he would sharpen the end of a match and, half hiding it behind his hand, dislodge them. Cod often found it necessary to go to Kansas City "on business"; he would be gone two or three days, and when he came back he would be sleepy and cross. Then in a few days he would be all right again; his head would go back, his gold teeth glitter, and he would be the life of the pool hall. Cod was an accomplished story-teller, and he knew the kind of stories that "went"; propped up against a pool table, one fat leg slowly swinging, he would tell a story, while his wife, with an apron knotted around her waist, was at home hanging out the clothes. Cod was fat, sleek, and "beefy," but his wife was thin, tired, and given to "spells." Cod said that he had had two good doctors and neither could tell what caused them. "Women are that way," he said. Sometimes on the morning of such a spell Cod would stay half an hour longer, buttoning up the children and frying some potatoes, but finally, leaving the skillets and pans in the sink, he would rush away to the pool hall. He was making a great success of the pool hall.

Cod descended upon Guy.

"Look who's here—William Jennings Bryan himself." He slapped Guy on the back. "Say, I hear you put it over last night in great shape. I wish I could been there, but you know how a business like this is." He waved a pudgy, hairy hand at the row of tables with the air of explaining it to the only

person who could understand its responsibilities. "Good for you. You know, I always said you had it in you. Have a pill."

It was "good business" to keep Guy interested. It was easy enough to get men from the bottling works, loungers from the stockyards, men from the ice plant, hired hands who drove in from farms for a night in town, but Guy lent distinction. Besides. his father was a preacher.

Guy selected a cigarette. The noise at the tables grew less, the men gathered about him, leaning on their cues, or lighting matches with a flip of the thumbnail. Guy felt the unspoken admiration leveled at him. It was pleasant.

Cod began to "get things going," as he expressed it, by telling a suggestive story. The Pastime had a reputation for liveliness. Other men, ambitious in that line, had come in and set up in opposition to Cod but after a time a card was put in and their windows soaped.

"Say, did you birds hear the story about the little boy whose father was a traveling man and didn't get home very often?" Cod looked around the circle of faces. "Well, it goes this way"—He told the story.

Such stories always had a fascination for Guy and many times he had listened to them. His parents had told him nothing of the so-called "mysteries of life." Instead, his father had talked of the "larger meaning of life" and had told him nothing. Guy was aged seven and was much mystified when suddenly, out of nowhere, a little sister came to his home. He asked his father where she came from and his father said that she was part of God's wonderful

plan. But Guy knew where he could get information—at the livery barn. He went to Jess, a tall, lank, ill-smelling, evil-mouthed, illiterate stableman. Jess was currying a mule. Jess's tobacco-stained teeth, when Guy fumbled out his question, showed in a dark, contaminated half circle.

"Say, Buck," he called to another stable hand, "this kid thinks the doctor brought his new baby sister to their house. Come all wrapped up in cotton, I expect, and tied with a fancy string." He laughed joyously at the prospect. "*Rap-rap*," went his currycomb. "He-he-haw! Don't let 'em soft soap you. Did you ever stop to think why your pap married your ma? Why didn't he marry some other man—like Buck, for instance? Now you go home and ask your pa where your sister came from."

Guy went home and asked his father.

"She came from heaven. She was one of God's little angels and now she is going to be your little sister. But you mustn't ask such things, Guy. They will all be revealed to you in proper time. It is God's way."

Guy did not go to his father again.

His father had let him go ignorantly into the world; he did not believe in giving his son such fundamental knowledge. Some false sense of modesty had kept him from imparting such information to Guy. When Guy wanted to know about life, Adrian Plummer talked about God; as a result, such things had for Guy a great and powerful fascination. Guy was a "book boy"; when other boys were playing with goats in the street Guy was reading. Moved about from place to place, as "calls" came, he had

not acquired the worldly knowledge which belonged to others of his age.

As he grew older there were other doubts and suspicions. There was the incident of the flies. On this occasion he had said to his father, "Pa, what are flies good for?"

His father hummed and hesitated, but did not try to evade, for evasion was not part of Adrian Plummer's nature.

"I don't know, Guy, but they have some good use or God would not have put them here."

He pressed his father for a more satisfying answer, and then his father read a chapter from the Bible to him and thought he had stilled all doubt.

There were other occasions. Once he had asked, suddenly, "Pa, does God make the lightning?" and Adrian Plummer assured him that it was one of "God's manifestations."

"Then why did God let it strike our church?"

The incident had happend several years before and ever since Guy had been carrying it in his head.

"It was part of the Lord's wisdom," returned Plummer, "He performeth great and wondrous things and man in his small way cannot see the explanation, but we may rest assured that God in His infinity had a reason for it."

It was the answer which had been given him when he was a boy; it ought to do for Guy.

Now, in the pool hall, Guy looked at the admiring eyes turned on him. Some of them were the loafers who had tagged into the church the night before, and now they stood silently looking at Guy, expecting him again to display himself. He would

try to tell a "funny" story. He raked his brain feverishly.

"Say, did you fellows hear this one?" he began. "It goes this way. There were three old maids and they had never been around much and didn't know anything." But the story did not move along easily; his lips were dry and he had to swallow. It was preposterous that one who had made such a stirring speech the night before could not tell a pool-hall story. "Well, one day a man came to the house where they were living all alone—" He spilled out the story.

When he finished there was a polite cackle of laughter, a cue was pounded on the floor, but Guy knew that the story had failed.

But Cod Dugan's quick laugh arose. "Say, that's rich; some juice in it—when you see the point." He gave Guy a clap on the back. "I was down to Kansas City yesterday and I heard a good one." He disgorged the story.

The circle laughed. Cod knew how to put in the fine touches.

"Well, what do you think of it?" He chucked Guy in the ribs and at the same time gave a humorous click of his tongue.

"I think it's a good story," said Guy, but he was thinking how much he would give to tell a story with Cod's zest. It seemed to him, at the moment, a great and wonderful accomplishment. And as he listened to Cod's stories and looked at the pictures on the walls he felt a stirring. What it was he did not know; he only knew that it made the Pastime a most fascinating place.

"Did you fellas hear what's comin'?" asked Cod. "'The Gay Hottentots.' That's what I found out down in K.C. and they are sure some hot babies. Sixteen of 'em and every danged one a beaut. They got a strawberry blonde with them named Tootsie that 'ain't got a bone in her body." He painted the glories of the cheap burlesque troupe. "I got acquainted with the electrician of the show and when it gets here I'll give you a knockdown. Then he can introduce you around. Yes, sir, there's more 'n one way to skin a cat." He winked a whitish, protruding eye significantly. "Do you want to see something good? It ain't anything you'll ever see in your Lesson Quarterly. Well, then, just rest your optics on this."

Before Guy he held up a cheap advertising booklet, distributed by a mail-order house, and filled with revolting drawings.

Wetting his thumb, Cod turned the pages.

"Rich? Why, rich ain't any name for it! Listen to what this paragraph says. I got it marked with my thumbnail." He read the salacious words. He began to give advice about love. "A fellow who takes a girl out more 'n a couple of times without getting his arm around her hasn't got much of the old hickory in him—that's all I got to say."

Guy's thoughts flew back to the failure he had made at story-telling. If he could spellbind them the night before, he could make a success of it now, he told himself.

"Say, you birds," he began, "did any of you hear the one about the bride on the Pullman? Well, they got on at a little town named Chambersburg—"

He saw the loungers stop, listen; balls were no longer banged about the blue cloth. All were intent on the story. His imagination ran free and he began to give the story a dash and go. He added to it as he went along; new ideas suddenly unrolled before him, pleasing touches he had not thought of before. His confidence of the preceding night returned. He saw that he had brought his listeners under his spell, and he felt a glow of pleasure. He continued: "And then she starts down the aisle, after getting her drink of water, and it is all dark, except maybe one light burning down at the end of the car, but she can't see the numbers on the curtains and so doesn't know which her new husband is in. And just at this minute the fat traveling man rolls over and sticks out his foot—"

He was interrupted. The screen door had opened, the draught drawing out a stream of smoke, and a girl of ten or twelve entered. She was a daughter of a family living next door to the Plummers. Her shrill voice rose:

"Guy, your mother wants you to come home this minute."

He looked at her resentfully. What in the world did this snip mean, shrieking out his name in a place for gentlemen only—and just at the moment when he was making a success of his story?

"Well, what does she want?"

"Your father's going to have a 'healing' and she wants you to be there."

Now he remembered. From time to time people came to his father, who, with the great and abiding faith that was in him, was able to cure them by the

process known as "laying on hands." The event always stirred up much excitement, many people coming from curiosity, a few through reverence. But whatever their motives were, they must admit the power of Adrian Plummer when he believed that strength from "on high" had come to him.

Guy stumped along behind the girl.

CHAPTER III

WHEN Guy reached home the people were already beginning to assemble. They moved down the sidewalk, by ones and twos, dressed in their Sunday clothes, and when they spoke to one another it was in subdued tones or in whispers.

Guy turned down the alley and came in the back way. In the barn were crutches, canes, and wheel chairs left by those who had been cured. Belief in the power of "cures" was quite common in this section of Missouri. Sometimes, in the country districts, persons with such "powers" passed along the road and gave treatments; sometimes they set up in school yards and the sick came to them. There were strange cases of the effectiveness of the people's beliefs. With Adrian Plummer the power came from his religious frenzy. It was done, he explained, by getting in touch with the Infinite; he was merely the "instrument of God." He could do nothing himself; if the person had not the "faith that overcometh all things" it was useless. He would not continue.

"Your pa," Mrs. Plummer whispered, "is in the study, getting ready."

Guy could hear his father's restless steps. They stopped; a chair was pushed back. His father was praying.

Guy knew with what fervor his father would pray;

sometimes when his father arose there would be tears in his eyes. Adrian Plummer had been a "bound boy" and had worked for his schooling and board for a farmer determined to get everything possible out of the piece of flesh intrusted him by the law. And then on young Adrian Plummer's twenty-first birthday he had given him a horse and bridle, as was the custom, and the boy had ridden out of the lot without a wave of his hand. He had promptly sold his horse, saddle, and bridle, and gone to a "church seminary." Guy's first remembrance of his father was as a country preacher. He conducted services in one church of a morning, exhorted his congregation with fierce earnestness, and then, evading the invitations to dinner extended him by members of the congregation, moved away in an old rattle-trap of a buggy. Reaching down under his seat he pulled out a lunch done up in newspaper, and, driving with one hand, ate with the other. From the package he took a brown bottle, which had once contained medicine, but now contained water to drink. Drawing the cork as he drove along, he lifted the bottle uncertainly to his lips, bending far over so that the joggling of the buggy would not spill it on his Sunday clothes. In the evening he would "assist" at a third service, and then, some time during the night, drive home. At last he had risen until it was necessary to have only one church and lived in small towns, making occasional trips into the country to conduct revivals.

Guy's first clear recollection of his father was on the way to these revivals. They went in a "hack." There were two seats. His father sat in front, leaning

slightly forward, clucking to the horse, but never using a whip. He loved horses, and no matter how late he might be, he rarely urged the animal to trot. On his face was a tense look as he thought over his sermon, and from time to time he would shout out a sentence: "You must repent and be washed in the blood of the Lamb," or, "Christ and Christ crucified—that is your only salvation." Again Plummer would click to the horse, scarcely aware that he had spoken. Sometimes his father would begin to sing abruptly. Mrs. Plummer, clearing her throat, would join in, and then nudge Guy significantly; then his voice would be raised. As the hymn was finished Plummer would call out, "Praise the Lord, praise Him, all ye living creatures," and drive on in silence.

Or sometimes, as they drove along a country road, Adrian Plummer would suddenly clamp on the brake and hand the lines to Guy. Getting out, he would take a paint bucket and brush and begin lettering a message on a roadside rock: "Christ Died for You," "There Is Only One Way to Salvation—through the Blood of the Redeemer." Then he would climb into the rig, take up the lines, "*cluck-cluck*" would go his tongue, and the horse would move off. He was looked on as a strange and moody man.

Guy now went into the "parlor." It was only on rare occasions that the parlor was used. Usually the door was closed and the blinds drawn. Chairs had been brought from the other rooms and placed along the wall in orderly rows. On one of the walls was his father's and mother's wedding certificate. Many times he had looked at it and wondered. It was in a faded gold frame and was held in place by a nail with

a white porcelain head. As a border for the certificate was the picture of a rope with an elaborate knot in each corner. There was a picture of a dove flying, with a streamer in its mouth; on one end was his father's name, on the other his mother's. And there was a line at the bottom, printed in gilt and standing out prominently, which many times had puzzled his small head. It read, "It is not good that man should live alone." He could not see what it had to do with getting married; it seemed to refer to Robinson Crusoe.

"We'll have to take the center table out," said his mother, and, attempting to walk on her toes, led the way. It was Mrs. Plummer's most prized bit of furniture. The legs ended in bronze eagle talons, each one gripping a glass ball, which rested on the carpet. From time to time Mrs. Plummer would get down on her knees and, placing the can of metal polish on a folded newspaper, go carefully over the bronze talons with a whitish, smelly liquid, and then, running up the blind, would stand off and admire the relentless claws. On the table was a zither, which Plummer sometimes played when he was unusually happy. And also there was a stereoscope. Guy knew each and every card by heart. By putting the pictures in wire supports and by moving the frame back and forth on the wooden slide, it could be adjusted until the picture came to view. In his early days the pictures had seemed wonderful, but later he had lost all interest in them. Mostly they were of Biblical subjects: "The Gate of Joffa," "The Hill of Capernaum as It Now Looks," "From a Housetop Overlooking Jerusalem." There were a

few others: "The Giant Redwoods," "The Royal Gorge," "The Garden of the Gods," "Niagara Falls From Goat Island." Guy did not look at them once a year, but from time to time his father would take them into the sitting room, draw his chair to the window, run up the blind, and fit his head to the hooded eyepiece. Then he would turn the picture over, read the description on the back, place it carefully down, and pick up the next one. He rarely ever looked at what he called the "secular" views.

In the corner was a low, squat organ which had been given to Adrian Plummer by one of his former churches when it had bought a more up-to-date instrument. Sometimes he would straddle over the velvet stool and, raising his great hands, try to play. After a time he would give it up and, going into his study, open his bible and, adjusting his gold-rim glasses, begin to read.

On one of the walls was a picture of Mrs. Plummer's folks. The family had gathered on the porch of their rented house and, with the boys squatting cross-legged and the girls standing up, had had their picture taken. When a picture agent came around she had it enlarged and put in a huge gold frame. She was very proud of it.

The parlor filled up; chairs were placed in the sitting room, while some of the people had to stand on the porch. Others gathered in the yard, wondering whether it would be just right to look through the window. Mrs. Gropper, who was to be cured, sat in the middle of the room. She had rheumatism and her cramped arm was drawn across her breast, like a claw. It had been growing worse lately, until at

last she had decided that she had the necessary faith. There are some people who talk incessantly all through life. Old age does not seem to dry them up. Mrs. Gropper was one of them. Each spring she bought a pig from some farmer, kept it in a basket behind the stove, and talked to it all the time it was eating. When the pig was large enough she took it out to a pen in the back yard. As she pulled weeds in her garden she talked to it, and the pig grunted in return. In the fall she sent it away to be butchered. In all kinds of weather she would attend to her pig and it was thus that she had contracted rheumatism.

There was a stirring and a thin, wizened man, peering out from under a pair of gold glasses balanced on a sharp nose, came to the door and looked in. He was R. L. Arnhalt, and from one end of the town to the other were his signs, nailed on vacant houses and on lots, "Ask Mr. Arnhalt—He Knows." He sold property and collected rents; when a family could not pay he sent them the form warnings, finally went to call on them personally, was immensely sorry, and, as the matter was out of his hands, went away. A few days later a deputy would appear with the notice. He had made a great success of his business and was known as an energetic citizen and loyal booster for Junction City. So many of the men were inclined to take it easy, but not so with R. L. Arnhalt. He was the first man to see the necessity of having a huge signboard painted and put up at the depot announcing the population of Junction City Stop and its nine natural advantages. He had worked out, when he appeared before the Commercial Club, just how

many persons passed Junction City each day and showed how many would see the sign in a year. It was stupendous. He organized a "Clean-up day" in which all the town got out, raked up tin cans, carried off broken bottles, and mowed the weeds. He got the merchants together and had them offer free tickets to the motion-picture theaters to all farmers who would trade in town on Monday afternoon. He hated all other towns which in any way were rivals of Junction City, and when he made a trip in his automobile he had a huge flag floating behind with "Junction City" lettered on it—large letters at the beginning and then tapering off at the point. Mr. Arnhalt's ideas were helpful and rarely ever meant an increase in taxes.

He had another side. In addition to his worldly success, he was an ardent member of Adrian Plummer's church. He was an usher. Each Sunday morning he passed the collection plate, standing with his head slightly bowed as the plate went the length of the seat, but his eyes followed the amount each person dropped in; then down the next row. No other person in the church was so active in thinking up fairs, festivals, and suppers.

Now, spying a seat, Arnhalt moved across the parlor floor with his head bowed, as if taking up a collection, and then sat down with a slight grunt. With him was his daughter, Dessie. She had her father's thin nose and commanding way, and on her upper lip was a slight mustache. She was organist in the Sunday school. She could be called on at almost any time and would help. She liked to do things, she said. Dessie did not have much "com-

pany" so far as young men went, but when the time came she would be able to take care of herself. She now found a seat on a folding chair and, drawing in her toes, began to look the people over, scarcely moving her head. At last her eyes settled on Guy.

Guy sat still, looking at the people, listening to them breathe, sometimes catching an eye and wondering if he should speak. At last there was a sound—his father was coming. The door of the "study" closed; the heavy, stiff fall of feet, and then his father appeared in the doorway, the worn bible gripped in his hand. There were an intenseness, a soberness, and a power about him which on such occasions never failed to move a crowd. Too many times Guy had seen people come to be amused, and later had seen them kneel.

"Let us kneel in supplication," said Adrian Plummer.

It was more than prayer—it was impassioned pleading. Chairs creaked, were pushed aside, and the people knelt. His father, with his long, leathery legs stretched out behind him, covered his face with his brown, knotted hands. There was power and feeling in his prayer and the people moved as if some strange spirit had settled upon them.

"Let us sing," he said on rising, and looked at Dessie.

Dessie took her place on the stool, proud of the distinction. The covering on the pedals was worn away and the brass shiny from the rubbing of many feet. The cloth strip which pulled the bellows was frazzled and torn, but the pitch of the organ was

pleasant. Adrian Plummer began to keep time with his book.

"Now, all together," he said.

He read the story of Christ healing the halt, and then, putting his bible on the organ, began to talk, at first his voice low and uncertain; then slowly it began to rise; soon he was lost in his subject. The emotions of the people began to respond. Guy had seen the same response at camp meetings. Here in a tent in August, with the long corn row coming up almost to it, he would exhort, with the perspiration running down his face. Soon he would have the meeting shouting. After the camp meeting was over his father would be silent and moody for days.

Fire now leaped to his eyes and some hidden fountain of strength rose in him. The people were no longer restless; they bent forward and from time to time turned to Mrs. Gropper, who was beginning to moan. Adrian Plummer grew calm and brushing away tears with the back of his hand, moved toward Mrs. Gropper.

"The Lord anointeth and the Lord maketh whole."

Mrs. Plummer appeared in the doorway with a bowl. In it was olive oil, and Guy saw his father draw up his sleeves, exposing his cuffs, but no one noticed. His father dipped the tips of his figners and rested them on Mrs. Gropper's arm. "Pray," he called, thickly, "all of you." There was a movement of lips, a soft whispering. Abruptly Adrian Plummer seized the arm in his great grip. There was a tense, breathless moment and the arm began to bend.

"It's going," cried Mrs. Gropper.

A shout went up, chairs were overturned, people rushed about.

"I felt myself tremblin'," cried Mrs. Gropper, "and I knew it was going to move. Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!"

The healing was a success. Adrian Plummer relaxed and his lighter manner came to him. In the hubbub he clapped his hands and called humorously, "Brothers and sisters, don't forget Saturday night at the church. The Lord willing, we shall have our annual box social. Everybody come."

At last the people went out onto the porch and stood about in the yard, all talking at once.

There was a light jingle, the pleasant sound of rubber tires, and Guy looked up with quick apprehension. It was as he feared—Bee Chew and her father were passing in Bee's trap. Guy saw a startled expression come to their faces as they looked at the excited, gesticulating people, and then Bee said something to her father. What was it? How this turbulent scene must look to them! The trap rolled on; the pleasant jingle was drowned by the chatter. A hot resentment ran over Guy—why did his father want to fill up the yard with such people? Nobody like that ever came to the Chew home.

CHAPTER IV

ADRIAN PLUMMER arrived an hour early at the church on the evening of the "box social." For the church to have anything special put him in his best mood. Taking off his coat, he hung it on the back of a chair, removed his cuffs, and then went down the stairs into the basement storeroom and fished in the litter for candles, wreaths, bunting, and flags. He came banging up the stairs with the step-ladder and went about the deserted Sunday school room, trying to give it a festive touch. He brought out the flag which his Sunday school had won for the best "record" at a meeting in Joplin, and, looking about for a cloth, polished the bronze spear head and then spread out the gilt rope. He brought out new banners and golden mottoes and put them about the walls, and then, going to the blackboard, he took a piece of chalk and hitched up his sleeves. His hand moved in circles for a moment, and then he drew a picture of a much-flourished dove. He had learned it in "writing school" and it was his one proud accomplishment. In its beak he put a banner and then printed on it, "God Is Love."

At last the people began to arrive. Putting on his coat , he pulled the chain which manipulated the fasteners at the top of the door, threw it open, and called out greetings: "Come in. Don't be afraid of being early. Paul wasn't. Good evening, Mrs.

Arnhalt," and he began to talk excitedly to the good lady. He flew from one to another, making each feel at home; and sometimes clumsy, heavy jests rose to his lips. No one looking at him in this excited moment would think that sometimes for days he would be glum and silent.

"That's a mighty fat-looking box, Mrs. Duncan. I think I'll just put a mark on it." He pretended to search for a pencil.

With much laughter the boxes were brought to a table and handed over to two women working behind a screen. Here the outside wrapping was stripped off and a few mysterious passes, meant to baffle the eyes of those intent on identifying the boxes, were made and the boxes were placed on shelves. The men and boys, who later were to bid on the boxes, humorously clamored to be near. Jokes passed, hands were suddenly thrust in front of eyes which seemed to be peering too intently. The tempting array grew, some large, some small, some in gay paper, some in converted shoe boxes. And now and then a box was wrapped with a gilt string—"marked" for the right bidder. At the discovery of such a box new jests arose.

Suddenly, as Adrian Plummer moved among the merrymakers, a look of surprise spread over his face. Charles G. Chew had appeared at the door. He looked in for a moment with amused tolerance, and then turned aside, revealing Bee. After a word of parting with his daughter he went to his car. The driver and man-of-all-work about the Chew home opened the door and Chew sank back into the luxurious seat. At sight of him Adrian Plummer's shoulders

straightened, the smile slipped from his face, and his lips tightened. But in Chew there was nothing to take exception to; after the amused glance he had gone quietly on his way. And now Bee was advancing with a box under her arm. Plummer eyed her uneasily; except for her fresh prettiness, she was not to be distinguished from a score of other girls gathering for the social. Turning, she began to chat unconcernedly with acquaintances. A wild hope rose in Adrian Plummer. Maybe he had seen the "light"; the clouds might be lifted.

"Right this way, Miss Chew," he called, with a return of his light manner. "I'll get it by so that nobody will know." He made a pretense of hiding the box under his coat, and then passed it to the women behind the screen There was a tearing of papers, a juggling, laughter, and new boxes were added to those on the shelves.

At last Guy was able to get away from the store. As he went about his trifling duties he kept telling himself that it would not be for long. Soon the university would begin; four years of that, and then he would be "out in the world." The prospect was glorious. Then he would do things, set the world on fire. For hours at a time he would study the paper-backed catalogue, and had been astonished to find that it would take seventy-four years to complete all the courses. It staggered him that there was so much learning in the world, but soon the depression was gone—he would come out all right; he always had. He could take only a few of the subjects that he wished. He checked off the courses he wanted: law, international law, jurisprudence, political sci-

ence, logic, sociology, psychology, penology. He thrilled as he rolled the words under his tongue. He would be a statesman—not a politician—and do things for his country. He would be Governor first, then Senator. Slipping into his street coat, he hurried to his father's church.

The "entertainment" which was to precede the selling of the boxes was ready to begin. A little girl recited, "When I first stepped upon the stage my heart went pitty-pat, and I thought I heard some one say, 'What little fool is that?'" and then went on a run back to her mother's proud arms. A girl imitated a boy who was to speak a "piece" at school who could not remember it.

"The next will be a recitation by Miss Dessie Arnhalt."

Dessie came stiffly down the aisle, conscious of her new dress, and with her small, bony face hard set. She stood a moment and then made a slight bow. "Bingen on the Rhine," she announced and stepped over a few inches. "A soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers," she began and launched herself into the sad story. She spared no detail, for, with Dessie, a soldier must not only die, but must suffer. At last she disposed of him.

Guy's father was called upon and took his place on the rostrum. He could always be counted on to make the "entertainment" part a success. He smiled and began in his best light manner:

"Three dudes were walking along the street one morning when they met an aged and somewhat decrepit minister of the Gospel, with long white hair and beard. Desiring to poke fun at the old man, the

first called out, 'Hello, Father Abraham!' The second said, 'Hello, Father Isaac!' while the third chimed in with, 'Hello, Father Jacob!' The minister, seeing the situation, and likewise using Scripture, quietly replied: 'I am none of the three you mention, but Saul the son of Kish, who went forth to hunt his father's asses—and behold I have found them.'"

The people laughed, chairs creaked; boys in the rear began to whistle. Instantly the smile passed from Adrian Plummer's face. "This is the house of God," he said, and there was no more whistling.

He began another story, a sober one, for not long could Adrian Plummer be light-hearted:

"It was in the afternoon of the last day on earth of our martyred President, William McKinley, and he began to realize that life was slipping away and that the efforts of science could not save him. He asked Doctor Rixey to bring the surgeons in, and one by one they gathered around his bedside, these learned men. The dying man crossed his hands on his breast and half closed his eyes. There was a beautiful smile on his face as his last moments approached. The surgeons bowed their heads, while tears streamed down the faces of the white-clad nurses. The yellow radiance of the sun shone softly in the room.

"'Our Father, which art in heaven,' said the President, while the lips of the surgeons moved. 'Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done ——'

"The sobbing of a nurse disturbed the still air. The President opened his eyes and closed them again. A long sigh. The sands of life were running swiftly.

"'In—in earth as it is in heaven.'"

Descriptively he went through the prayer.

"'Amen,' whispered the surgeons and the President was dead."

When Plummer went back to his seat many were wiping their eyes, and it was some moments before the next number was called.

At last they were ready to sell the boxes, and Arnhalt took his place as auctioneer and cleared his throat elaborately.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am like the little girl who preceded me. When I step upon the platform my heart goes pitty-pat and I think I hear somebody say, 'What little fool is that?' Only, of course, in this case it would be big. Yes. *Hmmmmm!*" He dabbed his mouth with his handkerchief. "Ah, what have we here?" He pointed humorously at the boxes. "Ah, tell it not in Gath. It is food—food for the inner man, put up by the good sisters. Does it not tempt the pocketbook? *Hmmmm!* The boxes may look good wrapped so daintily, but that is nothing in comparison to the ladies who prepared them. Why, good folks, you would get your money's worth if you just bought the box and didn't eat it, but just sat there and looked at the lady!" Mr. Arnhalt considered himself at his best when referring to the ladies. He took up a box. "Think how that has been prepared by some fair feminine hand ——" Mr. Arnhalt wiggled his fingers to give an idea of the hand, "to thrill the heart of some mere man. Think of the steps back and forth in the kitchen the fair lady took. Time after time her lily fingers flew over the delectable viands, maybe a song

coming from her charming lips." He smiled a smile of bewitching flattery upon the worn women. "Now who is going to have the honor of putting in the first bid?"

The bidding began, and when the box was opened the slip of paper showed that it belonged to Mrs. Gropper.

The sale continued, Mr. Arnhalt attempting to furnish amusement. Suddenly Guy leaned forward —the box offered was wrapped in blue tissue paper. It was Bee's.

Borne on by his success graduation night, Guy had asked Bee to come to the "box social." He had had many fears. Would she want to go to so humble an affair? Would she laugh at him? And then with heart wildly beating he had called her up, and she had accepted. He had gone back to wait on his customers with a pleasant sense of floating. And then they had agreed upon the tissue paper.

Arnhalt was droning on. "Think of the wonderful things inside, fried chicken, cake, pie, strawberry jam. *Hmmmm!* Doesn't it make your mouth water?" He gave a vivid imitation of a person so affected. "Now start the log rolling boys. What do I hear? Fifty cents? Shame on you, brother. Why the yellow-legged chicken in here is worth more than that! Who next?"

Guy managed to say, "A dollar." It seemed to him that everyone in the room must be looking at him.

"Now who's got a little sporting blood in their veins? You wouldn't let that yellow-legged chicken go for that, would you? What good-looking man has

a dollar and a half in his pocket? Remember, you not only get one of the best suppers you ever put into your mouth, but a handsome lady, too. Who next? Ah! A dollar and a half. Make it two. There's a man who knows a good thing when he sees it. Do I hear two and a half? What about it, boys?"

It was rarely that a box, even with competition, ever brought more than three dollars.

Guy nodded his head.

"Ah! *Hmmmm!* There's another smart man."

One of the men in the corner nudged another and pointed to Guy, who had edged forward in his seat, his cheeks burning. There was some special reason why Guy wanted that box. It was an opportunity to "run it up" on him—something that all sought at a social. For a person to start out to buy his lady's box and then let somebody take it from him showed that he had no "sporting blood."

The man who had been nudged was Ed Hoecker, who ran the "commission house" and was a "sport." He wore a suit of the most advanced style, and a scarf pin in the form of a huge diamond question mark. Hoecker bought eggs to ship to the Kansas City and Omaha markets. Each morning he called up the market, got the day's quotation, and chalked it on the slate hanging on the door. When the farmers drove up with their eggs he did not gossip with them, as the grocery men did; he said that he could not waste his time. His desk was by a large window; he looked up every time a girl passed. The price he paid for eggs was not so high as the grocery stores paid—but it was cash. It did not have to be taken out in "trade." He always had ready money.

Hoecker stood up: his hand went into his hip pocket and money rattled. "I'll give three dollars." All knew that a "run" was on.

Arnhalt cackled. "Now that's the spirit. Don't be afraid to talk up. What next do I hear?" He turned to Guy. Guy hesitated: he could not let the coarse, heavy commission merchant have the box.

"Three and a quarter," he managed to say.

"I'll make it four."

"That's the way to talk turkey," cried Arnhalt. It was all money going to the church, and the more he got the greater his glory as auctioneer. "Go after it, boys. Faint heart never won fair lady."

There were a few scattering bids, but the contest soon narrowed down to Hoecker and Guy. The bid was raised to six dollars. Seldom had a box run up to more than ten dollars, and such an occurrence caused talk for weeks. "Ten dollars—just to eat one meal." The people would go over and over it, "I could make mighty good wages just starving to death."

There was the light of conquest in Hoecker's face. "I'll just make that ten dollars."

A four dollar raise! Never before had it been heard of. Arnhalt was immensely pleased. "Ah, Mr. Hoecker is a man of rare judgment. He's not going to let a good thing get away from him. Who is going to win the fair lady?" He turned to Guy.

"Twelve-fifty."

Arnhalt did not have to speak. "Fifteen dollars," called Hoecker.

Chairs turned; people stood up. Never had the church known such bidding.

There was a ringing in Guy's ears and the faces seemed to blur.

"Who's going to get the lady?" piped Arnhalt. "Let's see who means business. Who'll make it sixteen?"

The eyes of all were fastened on Guy, and mechanically he felt himself nod.

"That's what I like to see—two men who want a thing and both mean business. Who next?"

The bid was run up to eighteen. Hoecker began to grow cautious; how far could he push Guy? He must be careful not to have the box left on his hands. Even for a commission merchant that was a good deal of money.

"This is getting interesting," said Arnhalt. "Two young gentlemen after a fair lady's hand, and only one can get her. What do I hear? Twenty?"

"Sure," said Hoecker.

Arnhalt turned to Guy. "Twenty-one, who wants it?"

"Yes, twenty-one," said Guy, thickly.

Hoecker was still on his feet, but not so confident. His hands were gripped in his pocket—he was not rattling his money. He bid twenty-two.

Arnhalt came down the aisle and stood between the two contestants, turning from one to the other.

"You can't go back on your lady now. Who'll make it twenty-four? What's a couple of dollars? Are you going to do it—are you?"

Guy nodded.

Arnhalt turned to Hoecker.

Hoecker's hands came out of his pockets. "Not

me. I can find cheaper eating than that." And down he sat.

The Sunday-school room was buzzing with excitement. Never had the audience experienced such a sensation.

"Whose in the world can it be?" asked Mrs. Gropper, and then, leaning forward said to Dessie in a heavy whisper, "I guess you have a pretty good idea, 'ain't you?"

"Now we'll see who the fortunate young lady is," said Arnhalt, and ran his finger down the blue paper. He read the slip. "It is the name of Miss Beatrice Chew."

Adrian Plummer started to rise, but sank back. He tried to look at Guy, but Guy's eyes were turned on the floor.

At last the hubbub of excitement died down and the sale continued until the last box was disposed of. The men came to claim their partners; seats were moved, papers crumpled.

"I'll just wind up my string," said Mrs. Gropper to her partner as they opened the box. "You never know when such a thing is goin' to come in handy."

Guy moved down the aisle; all eyes were fixed on him. He was now a marked man—spending twenty-four dollars for a box. He would never hear the last of it. Numbly he took his place at Bee's side. He tried to think of something to say; there was a pale, sickly grin on his face.

"I suppose we had just as well begin," he said, at last.

He was cursing himself inwardly. What had made him do such a fool thing? And when he needed the

money so much? He had a sinking sensation, as if something in life was not quite so good. But out of the confusion Bee's sweet smile rose. Slowly a mounting elation stirred in him. He had got what he wanted; he had triumphed. Twenty-four dollars. What was that? It wouldn't be anything, after he got started in the world. He would probably make millions. Suddenly the sum seemed small and insignificant. He looked at Bee's bright face. How far above the people about them he and Bee were, he thought. Bee was the prettiest girl in town; he was the smartest boy. His pleasant thought were interrupted. He became conscious that his father was approaching, was bending over. Guy could see his absurd burnsides, the tufts of hair in his ears. His father began to remonstrate; Guy had spent a great deal of money. And then he turned his eyes on Bee. There was accusation in them. Had she come to the house of God in the proper spirit? Was there humility in her soul? Guy felt a burning indignation rising up in him; he saw the people staring, pressing nearer, straining to hear. Bee's cheeks were burning. At last Adrian Plummer left.

Now that Adrian Plummer had turned away, the confusion of hunting partners again rose; the noise of changing seats, chairs drawn into place, jokes about the boxes; Mrs. Gropper was holding up a chicken leg with her cured hand.

"Let's get out of here," said Guy, suddenly.

"All right."

Rising quietly, Bee carrying the box, the two slipped out the back way. The door closed on them, shutting out the hum of voices.

CHAPTER V

GUY and Bee walked down the street. In the first flurry of excitement they talked rapidly, with many exclamations and repetitions. What an adventure it was!

Guy's heart was beating quickly and he felt a strong moving elation running through him. What would his father say? Well, he didn't care. His father had no right to make a scene—hanging over them like an old crow. Fierce resentment rose in him. It seemed a great affliction to have such a father. Why couldn't he have a father like Bee's? he asked himself.

"We won't pay any attention to him," said Guy. "I never do—when he goes on one of his rampages." He dismissed him with a laugh.

He watched Bee out of the corner of his eyes. He could touch her with his elbow—faint, delicious rubbings of his coat against her sleeve—yet how far away she seemed. Oh, if he could only have her closer! Even in the midst of their excited reliving of the scene there was room for another thought. He must touch her arm. Other boys did. At the pool hall they were always recounting their victories. He had heard them talk about such triumphs by the hour. Such a thing would be nothing to Cod Dugan. Guy turned the idea over and over. He would find some excuse. Ah, he would wait till they came to a

corner and then take her arm to guide her. But when they reached the corner he was not able to raise his hand. They marched on. Was this the person he had just spent twenty-four dollars on? There wasn't anything to be afraid of, he told himself. It was ridiculous.

As they passed the candy kitchen he swung his eyes over to look at her again. Was this the person who meant more to him that any other being in the world? He thought of his mother. Of course, he must think of his mother: he had been told that all his life; he had heard it preached in a hundred sermons; it was what everybody said. Your mother was your best friend; she would stay by you when all others had deserted. But he could not get around the truth: Bee was in his mind more than was his mother. He would much rather be with Bee. At unexpected times Bee appeared before him in a golden haze; that very morning he had awakened with thoughts of Bee on his mind. As he lay in indolence she seemed to come floating into his room. What would she think if she could see his trousers all dumped in a heap on the floor? He started to get up and place them on a chair in orderly array, but dropped back. It was only half dreaming. He would not bother about them. But still he seemed to see her floating into the room, but not noisily and heavily as his mother walked. Never would Bee be so heavy and commonplace. She would always be a wonderful, inspiring girl. Never in their old age would they sit for an hour at a time saying nothing, as his mother and father sometimes did. Bee was interesting; so much to talk about. She

could tell things that were so much funnier than could his mother. Bee was really a splendid conversationalist. Sometimes it kept him jumping to keep up with her. And witty! His mother never told funny stories; once in a while she would read an anecdote from the *Christian Herald*, a month later she would read it again. Bee never forgot anything. She remembered the slightest, smallest thing for months. She was a wonderful girl. That very morning he had had a long imaginary conversation with her. At last in delicious laughter he had stuffed a corner of the pillow in his mouth. It made him glow all over. He got up in the nightshirt which his mother had made for him, caught hold of the bureau and, bending over, peered into the wabbly glass hanging by its uncertain supports. He wrinkled his face into contortions, stared into the pupils of his eyes, spread his lips back, and polished his teeth on his sleeve. Girls liked nice teeth.

"You re my bonnie bluebell," he whispered aloud, ecstatically. "My own little prairie flower." He made up the phrases as he went along, putting more and more ardor into them. "You are the fairest flower that blooms. You need some one to protect and shelter you from winter's cold, cold snows. Yes, you do, you little blue cup." And at the thought of shelter tears sprang into his eyes. He repeated it again. "The big, big snows will surely come, darling, and you must have some one to shield you. Now the sun comes out. It kisses your cheeks, oh, so softly! for you know you are very, very pretty, my wild Irish rose."

Now, not for the world would he let her know the ridiculous actions she had inspired.

They discovered that they had the box with them. What would they do with it? Where would they eat? They began to laugh about it. Everything they said seemed funny.

They came to the courthouse which stands in the center of Junction City. Around it is a great yard with trees. It is called "the Square." In the courthouse yard are benches and a drinking fountain with a patent mouthpiece which can be regulated by pressing the handle. In the summer time the men running express wagons of their own lie on the grass, or spread themselves on the benches, waiting for an order. In one corner of the yard is the band stand, a large octagon-shaped structure with a cement floor—another one of R. L. Arnhalt's ideas. Here on Friday nights during the summer concerts are given.

"Let's go over and eat it in the band stand," said Guy.

Bee hesitated. It was unconventional. But unconventionality with her did not weigh much. Her ideas were those of her father. They walked together, rode together, and he talked to her freely. When the matter of sex had risen he had explained the creative forces so that no sordid deposit remained. To her they were a perfectly natural working out of the urge of life; and soon they were dismissed from her mind, so far as such things can be. And then he gave her ideas and thoughts which few in Junction City shared. One of his delights was to stretch out on the sofa at home and have Bee read to him; they were his golden moments, and he spared

her nothing. If an idea was good enough for him, it was good enough for her. He explained the growth of religion, drew comparisons between the principal religions of mankind, and talked of the great religious leaders as impersonally as he talked of Alexander Hamilton, Gladstone, and Lloyd George. He liked to take walks with her in the sparse woods around Junction City; one of his favorite amusements was on Sunday mornings to go into the country, walking riding, fishing—anything to get away from his customary routine. Usually they took along books. Chew prided himself on his daughter's "up-to-date ideas."

"All right," answered Bee, "we'll go."

Laughingly they went up the steps of the band stand. There was about it the thrill of an adventure. Bee spread out a newspaper on the seat and opened the box. There was a small paper folded neatly and put in at the last moment by the Chew cook; wonderingly they opened it, but in doing so they spilled it. It was the salt and pepper. It made them laugh; in fact, almost everything they did made them laugh. Guy told the story of the woman who had such a hard time telling her salt shaker from her pepper shaker that she put "T. P." on one and then put "T. P." on the other— "'Tis Pepper" and "'Tain't Pepper." It seemed immensely funny. A few people stared across the yard at them, then smiled and went clumping on their way. At one point Guy stood up with a drumstick in his hand, and delivered part of his oration. It seemed most amusing—the very words which a few nights before had so thrilled the audience. Life was queer; it came back unexpectedly upon one.

Guy could not remember ever having such a good supper.

At last they finished. Gathering up the papers, they finally found one of the new garbage cans which had been added in a recent clean-up campaign. Dropping in the refuse, they walked idly down the street.

They came to the candy kitchen. Guy hesitated. Inside were couples of their own age, humped over tables, laughing and talking, while Nick, the Greek proprietor, moved among them with his spotted apron, placing the large red check face downward on the table. It was inviting, but Guy could not turn in. He had spent far more money than he could afford. When he thought of the amount a sickening feeling arose. But when he turned to glance at the radiant Bee, the incident at the church began to slip away.

An automobile drew up at the curbing and honked commandingly. In it was Harlan Thompson, and with him was Pearl Duncan, a girl of Bee's own age.

"Shoot me a couple of nut sundaes, Nick, old socks," called Harlan with a flourish.

Harlan was Guy's most intimate friend. His father was proprietor of the Thompson lumber yard and one of the richest men in Junction City. Harlan could easily afford to go to the state university, but for him life was too swift for cloistral study. He preferred to stay at home and "help" his father.

"You ought to run down to K. C. with me," he would say. Harlan always called it "run." "Say, that's where you can have some fun. Oh, sister!" He launched into its possibilities. Harlan had a

"way" with girls. Vainly Guy had sighed for it; many times in the dashing atmosphere of the pool hall Harlan had told Guy of his adventures, but Guy had never been quite able to capture Harlan's disarming effrontery.

"You got to go after 'em hard," Harlan would advise. "Don't pay any attention to what they say. They got to shoot off their mouths some; that's natural. If they think you're slow, then it's good-by, Sally. They think a lot more of a fellow that's going to give 'em a good time than they do of some old stick-in-the-mud that's dead, all but pushin' over."

Harlan in his sweeping offhand manner made it seem easy.

Looking up from his confection, Harlan seized the horn and honked humorously. "By the great horn spoon, look who's here—Guy Plummer, the old ring-tailed sport! Good evening, Bee!" He spoke respectfully. "Say, you two got anything on? Nick! Nick!"—he reached for the horn,"—shoot us a couple more of the same ditto." He waved Guy aside as the latter made feeble motions in the direction of his pocket. "Your money's counterfeit. Slide in and we'll see if we can't start something." Reaching back, he swung open the rear door. "Put it down on the book, Nick. You know me."

The ice cream was consumed.

"What you folks say to a little spin? Wait till I fill up my tank and we'll bump around a little."

They rode up and down. Once great arc lamps had reached out over the streets, but a wave of reform had struck Junction City and a "White Way" had resulted. Now fluted columns, each bearing aloft

five frosted globes, constituted the proudest decoration of the town.

Harlan drove past the jail. It was a gloomy, red-brick building "backing" up on one of the "gullies" which marked Junction City. In the gully were broken-down fire wagons, discarded sprinkling carts, city graders—the general hodgepodge of changing administrations. In front of the jail the grass was cut and neatly kept, but in the rear jimpson weed, sumac, and elderberries flourished undisturbed, except twice a year when a man with a scythe came and created havoc among the chickens and guineas —for Junction City was the kind of town where one could keep guineas. Under a flow of witticism from the barred windows, the man wielded his scythe, and then, hoisting the blade on his shoulders, returned leisurely to the street commissioner's room in the basement of the courthouse—and another big day for the jail was over.

"How would you like to go in there?" asked Harlan, humorously. "There's no place like home." It was always a great joke in Junction City to say something about the jail.

They passed the water tower. Coming into Junction City by train it was the first thing to be seen—a great brick structure on iron stilts. This and the steeple of the court house were the two things first to greet the eye. Junction City was one among the thousands of towns on the flat-lands of the Middle West which depended on the tower for its water supply. There was no ground high enough for a reservoir; not even high enough to send the water to the second stories. As a result the water was

pumped from the small muddy corn-lands river to the water tower. The tower was a town character; the city revolved around it almost as much as around the court house, or around the Square. Picnic parties were held at its base; boys climbed up the little iron ladder, which seemed to reach to infinity, as high as courage lasted and then scratched a chalk mark on the red brick; then the next boy tried to raise it. This was severely forbidden by the mothers, but supper has to be prepared. On one occasion the tower created a sensation. A ring of ice froze at the top—tons and tons of it. The water, during the succeeding days, was withdrawn, leaving the ice clinging to the top of the tower. A nice spring day came; the sun shone. Suddenly there was a roar, the street trembled and the bricks at the bottom of the tower were puffed out as if of paper. The tower rocked dizzily for a moment, then crashed. The event is still spoken of.

The tower was a city landmark. One lived near the Burlington station, or near the Catholic church or out by the Chautauqua grounds. The section where Guy and Bee lived was spoken of as west of the water tower.

They rode along the tree-lined streets—as straight and as regular as a checkerboard. Along the sides of the streets willows and maples had been planted, for when Junction City was laid out there had been only a few scrub oaks, pig-nut trees and cottonwoods to greet the voyagers. East and west the presidential streets ran, while the north-and-south streets enjoyed the names of trees. Thus there were Ash, Sycamore, Birch, Poplar, Pine, Mulberry, Vine, and so through the forestry catalogue.

On the outskirts of town Harlan turned down Prather Avenue, the only street in town which did not follow the compass; instead it pursued some whim of its own. In reality, it had been an early trail across the prairies and which had not been closed up when the city fathers had decided to be somebody. As a result it jogged through the outer edge of town and lost itself in the country, with thanks to nobody. Lately it had come to be called "Lovers' Lane" for some reason not quite clear, for it was in no way a lane and had nothing more sentimental to mark its wanderings than billboards for competing racket stores.

Harlan turned his head to call to Guy and Bee, sitting sedately in the back seat.

"I guess you don't know where we are." And with that he dropped his arm around Pearl's waist. There was objection, and after a moment he lifted it. "Say, I was never any good as a one-armed driver," he said, and drew the car up by the side of the road. The lights were turned down.

Harlan was at his best; there was no end of funny things he could think of. He had made the most of the jokes in *Hostetter's Almanac* and he had not gone to the vaudeville shows in Kansas City for nothing. Conundrums, rebuses, catches, limericks—he was brilliant. And as he talked the spirits of the party rose and deftly he drew Pearl into his embrace.

Guy could not bring himself to take such liberties with Bee. He sat stiffly on his side of the seat, yearning, but something held him back. His attempts at cleverness were slow and labored in contrast to Harlan's brilliant quips. For Guy to be with

a girl made him serious, when by nature he was not so. Over him was a sweet haziness, an enticing stimulation, but he could think only of heavy things to say. He must be intellectual. A few days before he had read a dissertation at some length as to a possible ending of the world. Always when he felt himself stirred in this manner he turned to the intellectual side as the one that would make the best impression. He waited for an opening in the conversation.

"By the way," he said, "when you look up there at the stars twinkling so silently, did you ever stop to think how this world is going to end? Well, there are several interesting theories. One is that if ice keeps on accumulating at the North Pole maybe it will slip a fraction of a degree—"

"And we will be joggled like this," said Harlan, and again pulled Pearl into his embrace. "Let'er joggle, that's what I say." He made it ridiculous. "The sooner she joggles the happier your Uncle Dud will be. Who wants to be an icicle, anyway?" It was a good point and Harlan went over it several times. "Be there an icicle around here? Bee there?"

"I think you had better take me home," said Bee, "before we get too silly."

"Another county heard from," laughed Harlan. "The old bus won't run, she won't, she won't. Who wants to get out and pushee? You know what the chink said about a street car the first time he saw it, 'No pushee, no pullee, but allee samee go like hellee.'"

The foolishness continued.

Guy could not force himself to take any of the

liberties that came so natural with Harlan. He did not know whether or not he was in love with Bee. She was the most appealing girl he knew. When he was away from her she was in his thoughts, and endlessly he would go over and over her slightest word, recalling just the intonation she had given it, attaching far-fetched significance to it. He wished to take her into his arms, to whisper into her ears; when he was absent it seemed so easy; when she was actually before him something stern, something unrelenting, held him aloof and impersonal. Yet some emotion great and powerful was astir within him.

He admired her, feared her a little. The stories he heard at Cod's pool hall did not seem to relate to her. At least, he thought so. She was far too noble, too wonderful—somehow too fragile—for such coarse mouthings.

Now as Guy looked at Bee something alluring was leading him on. If he could only "show 'em a good time" the way Harlan did. His mouth was open and he felt a curious sense of excitement. He decided to touch her knee.

"I think we had better go home," said Bee.

"We won't go home till morning," Harlan began to sing. "We won't go home at all. I was drunk last night, dear mother. I was drunk the night before. Whoa there! Get up, I say!" Reaching for an imaginary buggy whip, Harlan sought to drive an imaginary horse. It was all very silly and humorous.

"I think the bellyband is unbuckled," emulated Guy, and, jumping out, sought to find the dislodged strap. But it did not seem nearly so funny as if Harlan had done it.

"I don't think that was very nice," said Bee. "What are you reading now? I have just taken up the letters of Alfred Henry Wallace. Daddy thinks he is wonderful."

As they discussed books, Guy forgot the self of a few moments before. Suddenly he wished he hadn't said "bellyband."

At last they started back, Harlan clucking and pretending that the car was a horse.

"I'm getting chilly," said Pearl, with a shiver.

"I'll lend you my coat sleeve," said Harlan, and slipped an arm around her. Harlan had an answer for anything a girl could say.

As they rattled along the vitrified brick paving, dropping into occasional chuck holes which a later administration had not seen fit to fill, the lure suddenly began to pull at him again. "When we pass under the railroad bridge," Guy said to himself, "I'm going to kiss her."

The structure loomed on its skeleton poles. When he made up his mind to do a thing, it was just the same as done; he prided himself on that. That was one of the reasons why he knew that he would get ahead in life. Nothing could hold him back. He would make Bee proud of him some day. Then he would come to claim her. He would remind her that the first time he kissed her was under the trestle.

The bridge began to echo to the rattle of the car, and he swallowed. He swallowed again. Over him was a delicious tingling.

"Whoa there, Sally! Whoa there!" said Harlan as a piece of paper flapped and he made the car wabble in imitation of a skittish horse.

They met a car and Guy was glad. Of course, with a car passing he couldn't do it. He breathed easier and began to talk again.

"Think! Darwin studied the earthworm twenty years. But my father won't let me read him."

"I could lend you daddy's book," she said.

He was elated. They seemed to be entering together into some delightful conspiracy. It was stimulating to talk to a girl with such brains.

Harlan had thought up his retort and turned to bellow it over the seat:

"And I'll bet he didn't catch a single fish."

Returning, they rattled through town. One by one the lights had gone out, except in the office over the Missouri Valley Bank, where Mr. Chew was still reading. A light still blazed in front of the Greek's candy store. It would be the last one to go out. The man with the popcorn wagon had moved away and only a few loungers laughed in darkened doorways.

"Folkses, what do you say to tanking up on some hot chocolate?" asked Harlan. "All in favor stand on their head."

Fortunately for Guy, the consensus was against it, and, rattling down the "White Way," Harlan turned into Buchanan Street, where Bee lived.

"Won't you come in," asked Bee, after the others had gone on. "It isn't late yet. How would you like to make some fudge?"

To be in her house was wonderful. It seemed different from any other house he had ever been in—more sacred. In one corner of the room was a piano with an ornamental scarf draped over it. It made

Guy think of the organ at his home with its bric-a-brac and small mirrors; how old-fashioned it seemed—especially with the stuffed wabbly stool. Bee's was a double, polished stool which turned silently without creaking. He gave it a spin. How far above him Bee seemed, how wonderful!

They made fudge.

He watched her as she regulated the alcohol flame. So many people had chafing dishes, but the dishes would never work. Everything at Bee's house worked. Think! she could do this and he couldn't. "If you grease the bottom it keeps it from sticking." He didn't know that. The thought came to him, "She would make a dandy housekeeper." His mother always saw a girl from that angle. Somehow he couldn't quite explain it, yet it made him thrill. Marry her? He didn't know whether he wanted to or not. He didn't even know whether or not he was in love with her. What was love? He didn't know. Certainly it wasn't anything the sentimental books made out. All he knew was that when he was around her he felt pleasurably stimulated. Then, sometimes, he grew tired of her and would rather be down at the pool hall. A person in love shouldn't feel that way—love was a life-long affection that never wavered, never departed. Tomorrow, as he worked in the drug store, he would go over and over everything they had said together, just how his hand had touched hers when he went to spin the stool. Why hadn't he caught hold of her then? Harlan would have been alive to such an opportunity.

"I didn't get to explain all the theories of the

world coming to an end," he said. "You know how old Harlan keeps butting in. Lord Kelvin has another theory. He says that the sun is gradually cooling off and that the earth is, too, and that after a while, millions of years I mean, the world will become a frigid zone, like the North Pole, and gradually life will become extinct."

He flushed with enthusiasm; conversation was stimulating. She sat on the stool, picking at the drapery of the piano. He felt that he was at his best. He could feel his power growing. He didn't know that he could talk so well.

"You make me feel so little and no account," she said when he had finished. "Like a mouse. You read a great deal, don't you?"

"Oh, yes! some. In fact, I guess more than the average dub."

He walked around the room, talking, turning to look at her from time to time. He hadn't felt so exalted in a long time. Yes, he was in love with her. There was no doubt about it.

They began to talk of love, as an abstract proposition; as if it had nothing to do with them; as if they were two impersonal observers sitting on some remote sphere watching an aloof spectacle.

Guy was thinking of himself; Bee of herself.

The world seemed easy; they had but to take it.

"Do you think real love comes but once?" Bee asked.

"I don't know; sometimes I do and sometimes I don't." Guy began to walk up and down the room; he always felt that he was at his best on his feet. "Look at the great characters of history." He had

to think a moment to summon them. "You know who I mean. Dante, for instance. You don't think of him as ever being able to love anybody but Beatrice." Guy paused, swept by an idea. "I never thought of it before, Bee, but her name was the same as yours. Isn't that funny!" They were struck by the marvel of it. "Only, of course, I have the awful name of Guy. Think what a blight to hang on old Dante—Guy! Can't you see him sending in his card to Beatrice—Mr. Guy Dante! He couldn't have got to the front gate. Her dad would have kicked him clear into middle of kingdom come." They both laughed; they liked to laugh. They grew serious. Guy felt great moods sweeping him, from the ridiculous to the serious and back again. "But I do think, after all, nature—now I am not talking about the Bible or anything that way—intended there should be just one—" he was going to say "mating," but the word seemed too coarse—"well, coming together. Look at certain of the animals." He began to enlarge upon it. "Why it runs all through the invertebrate animals and birds. Look at the—well, there are any number of them;—the golden eagle, for instance." He wondered if he were right. He would look it up to-morrow. "Why, lots of animals will pine away and die if anything happens to their mates. Dante was never really happy afterward, you know." He must look up that, too. But, anyway, the spirit of it was true. Harlan couldn't talk that way. There wasn't really any comparison between them. Harlan could "show off" around the girls, but girls wanted something more than mere

flashiness. He wished that Harlan were there now—under the sofa or some place. He would be surprised at how smart Guy was. His best friend didn't really know him. After all, to get right down to it, nobody did except Bee. He felt a warm glow. How much more splendid was this than cutting up in the Ford. He felt an irresistible longing to put his arms around Bee; but instead he kept aloof. "You know, they say that every great piece of art or oratory or painting or anything that way was inspired by a woman. Look at Michael Angelo, the big painter." His knowledge was hazy; he would have to verify that, too. Some way or other talking with Bee always gave him ideas.

"Wasn't it strange that I knew you so long—and didn't know you!—till that day in the laboratory? Which hand was it you burned?" She held out her hand. "Can you see it yet? Are there any marks on it?" Her hand was lying on the piano keys and he felt a quickening. He picked it up; his mouth was dry and he felt that he must keep on talking. "Yes, this is the hand. You have a pretty hand, haven't you? Long and artistic. Look at how you love to play. Play a little now." Holding her fingers he struck them on the keys. It thrilled him.

"We mustn't make too much noise," she said, and drew her hand away; then sat on both of them.

He was helpless.

"Are there marks on the other one?"

She held up her pink fingers. "Only where I caught this one in a sausage grinder."

They both laughed.

"Oh, were I a sausage grinder!"

"You horrid thing." She struck at him playfully.

He had said it well. Harlan would have blurted out something like, "Wouldn't I like to have been in the sausage grinder's place?"

"What! Would you strike your benefactor?" He caught her hand again. "Shame on you, Beatrice. That is really a sweet name. No wonder old man Dante got so het up over it."

It was wonderful how they could pass from the serious to the ridiculous. So Guy told himself. There was no one else with whom he could have so many exhilarating moments. His father and mother were at home in bed,snoring, probably. It made him wince to think of it. Some way it didn't seem wholly noble—and that was what true love was. It was the most elevating thing in the world. He would read up on it.

"You mustn't strike your Ben," he said, and it seemed very funny. And while they were laughing he again encompassed her hand.

"Look! My chair has the collywobbles," he said. "It keeps crawling up closer and closer to you all the time."

He drew his chair alongside her piano stool and took her fingers. "This little piggie went to market," and turning down her forefinger, he struck the keys.

At last Guy prepared to go home.

"Good night and thank you for a good time." She extended her hand.

He took it, formally; then went down the steps. What a tame ending, after all, to such an inspiring evening! He began to whistle, to sing. He could still feel the touch of those fingers.

The light was out in front of the candy kitchen and Nick was rattling the keys of the door. "Hello, Nick, old socks!" he called. It was Harlan's greeting. After such a wonderful evening, when he had talked so intellectually, he could afford to stoop to the inarticulate candy man.

"Locking up, I see. *Bon soir*"

"What you say?"

"Don't you know what that means, old head? It's perfectly good French. *Bon jour, monsieur. Comment allez vous?*"

Guy went off whistling.

The blinds were down as he passed Cod's pool hall, but a light was burning. He tried the door and after a moment one of the curtains was pushed aside.

"Come in, old sport," greeted Cod. "We're just having a rag chewing, that's all." The covers had been placed over the tables, but a group was loafing in the intimacies which night inspires. "Gus here has just been pulling off some good ones. Go on, Gus, give us another."

"I don't know whether I can think of one or not." Gus scratched his head. "Oh, yes! Did you ever hear the one about the traveling man who had been away from home for six months?" He looked around at the intent group, and as they shook their heads he laughed in pleasant anticipation. "Well, it's a warm one." Lowering his voice, he spewed out the story.

Guy forced a laugh and moved toward the door. It was revolting to him. Why had he ever laughed at such jokes? How different from the rest of the evening! He was through with such places.

Cod hooked a finger at him. "Wait a minute. Lend me your ear, Brutus. Say," he said, in a confidential undertone, "I got it straight they're coming in to-morrow afternoon—'The Gay Hottentots.' We boys are getting ready to meet 'em and show 'em a good time. Don't you want to go along? Warm babies, you know." Chucking Guy in the ribs, he clicked his tongue.

"No, I don't," said Guy and slammed the door. It was loathsome.

CHAPTER VI

AS Guy turned down Mulberry Street he saw a light shining in his father's house. He felt a vague uneasiness. His father always retired early, for the habit of the farm had fastened itself upon him. Instead of coming up the cement walk to the front door where his steps could be heard, Guy cut across a corner of the yard and went around to the side of the house. In the Plummer home only the blinds facing the street were ever drawn; and now, tiptoeing up, Guy peered through the side window. His father was sitting in his rocking chair; he had taken off his "congress" shoes and placed them beside his chair. All his life he had seen his father's shoes placed neatly side by side. His own he flung off and let them fall where they might, but with his father there was never such carelessness. How Guy hated those shoes; no one else had worn "congress" shoes for years. When his father bought a new pair the web held neatly against his ankles. Then it began to stretch; the top of his shoes began to gape. Sometimes Mrs. Plummer, taking a strip of black elastic from which she made her garters, sewed a piece. But the experiment was never a success. His father would catch his toes in it and, his temper rising, he would rip it out. The shoes then gaped more than ever; they were resoled, patched, and then, after they were impossible, taken to the barn.

Then they were called his "rainy-day" shoes, but Plummer rarely used them. The shoes rested on the shelf, their tops gaping like huge mouths, while the hayseed sifted slowly down over them. At last Plummer would carry them out to the back yard where the "trash" was burned, and throw them on the pile. The next day there would be a couple of pieces of steel from the soles and a few blackened eyelets. Then he would get a new pair.

Guy saw another figure moving about. It was his mother in her nightgown, the front fastened with a safety pin, and where the pin caught holes had been snaggled. From the kitchen to the dining room she moved back and forth, and back again, carrying something. Always he had heard his mother making these endless trips just before she went to bed, and even now from the outside of the house he could hear a slight jarring of the windows. She disappeared into the kitchen again and came out, this time carrying a blue teacup half filled with water. It was for her teeth.

"I'm not going to take anything from him," said Guy to himself, and felt a curious gathering intensity within himself.

Going back to the sidewalk, he came up the cement path, shuffling his feet and whistling with determined lightness. Pushing open the door, he flopped his hat on one of the pegs of the long folding rack.

"I thought I saw a light," he said.

His father motioned heavily to a chair. "Sit down," he said, took up his worn Bible, and spread it on his knee. He began to read aloud. It was a chapter on obedience.

Guy was determined not to hear; he looked about the room, examined his nails, studied the diagram in the carpet, unclipped his fountain pen from his pocket and elaborately dangled it in his hand, marked on his thumbnail, pursed his lips. In doing this a small, sharp sound escaped. Abruptly his father raised his eyes. Guy grew quiet.

"I suppose at times you think that I am unreasonable, Guy," he said at last, "but you must remember that I was born a long time before you—and then there is the Book." He laid his hand on it reverently. "At your age I was headstrong, too, but life has cooled me. I know things now that I didn't then. Youth is not given wisdom. I want you to remember that—when you are thinking of me as you are now." Guy was startled at the penetration of his father's thoughts. "I am not going to dwell on the money, Guy. That is over. But how could you leave the house of God—turn your back upon it—and deliberately go out with the daughter of an infidel? I don't suppose you will ever know, Guy, how I felt when I turned around and found that you had gone."

Adrian Plummer moved his hand across the region of his heart, and suddenly Guy saw a vision of what it must have meant to his father.

His mother came waddling in from the dining room, her face drawn in her usual tortured expression when she was emotionally stirred.

"Pa, he didn't understand," she cried. "Did you, Guy? Our Guy boy wouldn't do anything wrong, would he?" She continued to moan out the sentences, half crying, half sobbing. It was in this way

she "testified" at experience meetings. "Say you won't do it again, Guy. There is Dessie Arnhalt. She is a nice Christian girl. Infidels are awful people." Suddenly she paused and threw her heavy arm around Guy, and then looked to see if her nightgown was in place. Taking out the pin, she set it over.

At first Guy was defiant; his father was nobody, he told himself; he would rise much higher in the world than his father had; he wouldn't have such narrow, absurd views. And then the earnestness and the power of his father began to fasten on him. His mother, still crying and begging, wiped her sleeve across her eyes. "You will give her up, won't you?"

Suddenly Bee seemed very undesirable. She didn't mean anything to him, he told himself. His father must come first.

He made the promise.

Sternness slipped from Adrian Plummer and, reaching out his hand he took Guy's. "I knew you would understand," he said. "We will never mention it again."

Adrian Plummer's eyes shone and his voice trembled. Guy had come back into the fold.

Guy's tongue was suddenly loosened and the two talked as they had not talked in months. The barrier which had stood between them had slipped away. A few moments before Guy had looked down upon his father as being curious and eccentric, but now he felt a glow of kindness for him. After all, his father was a remarkable man, he thought. Bee seemed to vanish into some small and unimportant world.

"Don't you think you ought to write down to the university and see about renting a room?" his father asked, and they began to discuss Guy's entrance to that institution. "If I could afford it I would like to go down with you and see you entered up." A great wistfulness came to his father's eyes. Guy's going seemed almost as wonderful to him as it did to Guy. He was finding in Guy his own unfulfilled ambitions.

"I don't care whether you win a great number of honors or not, Guy," said his father, with sudden feeling, "but I want you to be a *good* boy."

His father need have no fears about him, he told himself. He was not that kind. And suddenly, as he looked into the yearning face of his father, he was filled with ambition to make his father proud of him. . . . The two talked on eagerly.

Mrs. Plummer came rolling out of the kitchen. "I brought you a warm glass of milk, Guy. It always makes you sleep good."

At last Plummer picked up his shoes. He always carried them in and placed them at the head of his bed, but never put them on in the bedroom. The next morning he would take them back to the sitting room and there draw them on.

"Good night, pa," said Guy. It was the first time in months that the family had said a word of good night.

"Good night, Guy," said his father, heartily. "Good night."

After Guy had gone up the creaking, uncarpeted stairs, his father went into the parlor and took the zither from the center table where it rested with the

stereoscopes. Putting on the coiled thumbpieces, he began to play "The Little Minister," softly moving his fingers across the strings. It was not often of late years that he played.

The next morning something very unusual happened in the Plummer household. A telegram was received. It was not often that such a great event took place in the Plummer family. The boy left his bicycle propped against the curbing and came up the cement walk and rang the bell. Mrs. Plummer came out in a flutter of excitement, her lips forming half-uttered sentences, "I wonder who it is," "I do hope it ain't ——"

"It's for you, Pa," she called, and Adrian Plummer came out of the "study" in his sock feet, for when he was preparing a sermon he must have his feet at ease. Resting the receipt book against the door jamb, he signed it, and then, taking his big, heavy clasp knife, he slit the envelope neatly and carefully.

"Oh, Ma," he exclaimed, "they want me in Kansas City!"

At last "the city call" had come. Mrs. Plummer was excited. "Read it. What does it say?" Her ambition was about to be fulfilled. As they had gone from call to call she had urged him to ask for something bigger, something more ambitious, but Plummer was not ambitious in this way. "I want to go where I can do the most good," he would say. But Mrs. Plummer had her eye on the glories of the city.

"Let me see it." She held the yellow sheet in her hands. "What do all them funny letters mean? We got the one about mother in the evening."

She was elated; wanted to show it to the neighbors; turned the sheet over and read the conditions on the back. Then she put it in the window where all passing might see.

Adrian Plummer returned to the preparation of his sermon. His grizzled head bent over the Bible and he again began making notes in his thick, irregular hand.

That afternoon when Cod approached Guy to go down to the depot to watch the burlesque troupe come in, Guy turned away. He was through with such things; would have no more to do with them.

"No, I got some reading to do at the Library," he said.

"Read—hell! There'll be books to read when you are dead and turned to sawdust. Jump in Harlan's car and come with us. It won't take half an hour. Then you can read your head off." Cod studied him a moment. "There won't be any harm in just looking on, will there?"

Guy had to admit that there wouldn't be.

Mechanically Guy accepted a seat.

Why hadn't he gone to the Library as he had planned? he asked himself. What made him such a gump as to give in? . . . He thought of Bee and vaguely wished that Harlan would turn back. Then he brought his mind firmly away from Bee. He was through with her; he had promised his father, and a promise was sacred.

When the train came in Cod Dugan, in his best suit, moved among the younger element, commenting out of the corner of his mouth: "It's a warm bunch of babies, all right. There's not a real lemon

among 'em. Of course, they don't look as good as when they got their war paint on, naturally, just comin' off the train, but you just wait till to-night when you see them rigged up. . . . Why, hello there, Frank, old scout!" and he rushed upon his friend, the show's electrician. "Let me shake your paw. Meet some of our fellows. Let me make you acquainted with Mr. Thompson, and this sport over here is Mr. Plummer." Introductions were effected.

"Say, Frank, what's the chance of getting a knockdown to some of the girls?"

The electrician thought it was excellent. "Do you see that there girl with the picture hat—kind of tall? And the one punching Jimmie?—he's our comedian. Well, them two's Tootsie and Pal. They're fuller of fun than a barrel of monkeys."

From the baggage car queer trunks were disgorged on to the platform along with returning chicken coops, milk cans, automobile tires, and machinery parts. The station was a small wooden affair with sanded sides, of neutral shabbiness. But even the rough coating had not discouraged those ambitious to leave their initials in public places.

The buses were backed up to the wooden platform. On the doors were painted the names of the two hotels they represented—the Commercial House and Beal's. The Commercial House was the best hotel, while Beal's was the one down by the livery barn.

The eight show girls, overdecorated, in bizarre and flashy clothes, were conscious of the interest they were arousing. They pretended to be absorbed in one another, but their eyes swept their estimating

circle. They began to talk about eating—always a popular subject.

"Gracious, I'm starving!" said one. "How about you, Jimmie?"

Jimmie had turned up the end of a battered suitcase and was propped against it. The girls found it necessary to flock around him, all repeating questions to him in squeaks and giggles. "Yes, how about you, Jimmie?" "Does Jimmie want something in his tum-tum?" But Jimmie was not a person to be deceived by such coquetry.

"Go on. You make me sick. You know damned well I'm hungry."

The girls turned their attention to the manager. "Please don't take us to some awful dump this time. The last place was a fright. Honest to God, it was."

"Say, I'm as stiff as a ramrod," said one of the girls, executing a few steps and humming snatches of a tune.

The crowd of loafers swallowed and moved their lips in anticipation.

"Here, get a move on," called the manager, and into a bus for the Commercial House he put the principals. "This way, you girls," and waved them into the bus for Beal's. The driver from his perch looked back over the pile of suitcases and pulled a strap; the door closed.

The wheels grated on the vitrified-brick paving as they started up the long street which led to the Square.

"Come on," said Cod; "let's go up and see 'em get out."

There could be nothing wrong in that.

Laughing and talking in their excitement, Guy and the others rattled down the street in Harlan's car.

"There's your old man," said Cod, and immediately Guy became quiet.

His father was moving along the street, his legs swinging in long steps, his eyes on the pavement, a book doubled under his arm, on the way to one of his innumerable meetings. Guy could not help wishing that he were as he believed his father always had been—without temptation.

Cod, the connoisseur, was talking: "Come on in and look 'em over. You can always tell more about them if you see 'em eating."

Guy remained firm. "No thanks, old head, I got to be stepping."

"Where are you going—to that old Library?"

Guy admitted that he was.

"You're always mooning around with your books and oratory and where's it going to get you? You got plenty of time for all that junk, but it'll be a hot day in January before a bunch of babies like this comes to town again."

Guy, however, went on to the Library. He felt proud of himself. Once he made up his mind to do a thing, nothing could stop him. That was the way to get to the top. But the Library seemed dull; it was hard to keep his mind on books. . . . He decided to stop by the pool hall. It was always lively at the Pastime. Cod was waiting for him.

"Here's a ticket you can have," he whispered, with breathy confidence. "I'm giving them to one or two of my special friends."

Guy accepted the yellow pasteboard. He wouldn't go, but he could take it along anyway.

He thought a moment. "Say, I couldn't let you give it to me," he said. and Cod took the money without protest.

As Guy walked home he looked at the ticket and tried to think which row it was. He counted the rows on his fingers. Well, he might drop in a minute or two just to get a line on what kind of show it was. . . .

The eager crowd gathered early outside the theater, laughing, talking, smoking, spitting. When Guy entered, the cheap curtain, showing a gondolier poling a curious craft up an impossible canal, was still down. Behind the frayed, splotched canvas were unknown wonders. There was a sound of pounding, furniture being moved, voices; suppressed excitement.

The girls came before the cheap, wabbly sets in stilted dances, but to Guy they looked wonderful. The jokes were funny—Jimmie could always say the right thing in the right place. Guy would remember them. He wished he could say such things. He would try. Eagerly he looked over the girls, thinking which he liked best. Cod was right—with their war paint on they did look good. It didn't seem possible that these gay creatures dancing to the fine music were the drab ones he had seen on the station platform that afternoon. But the show began to grow coarse. The jokes were no longer funny, but he must laugh. All the fellows were laughing.

The curtain went up again. The new scene was

supposed to be on Hottentot Isle and the girls wore only the clothes that the manager thought appropriate. Jimmie, now a missionary, had come to civilize them, but when the girls began to dance he no longer wanted to be a preacher. He became their king and established himself on a cocoanut throne. The cheapness of the performance became more apparent and the lines more revolting.

At last, with an ensemble of furious leg-shaking, the final curtain went down.

Even after Guy went outside the unsavoriness of the show still clung to him.

"I got it all fixed up." Cod gave a leering wink and whispered out of the corner of his mouth. "The girls are going down to the restaurant and Frank's going to give us a knockdown."

"No," said Guy, with an effort at casualness, "I'll have to be moving along. I got to open up in the morning."

"Open up—your grandmother! Come on down and listen to Harlan and I chin 'em a while. That 'ain't goin' to hurt you, is it?"

Guy had to admit that it wouldn't.

When they reached the Ideal Quick Lunch and Restaurant, men and boys were sauntering by, peering through the steamed windows; going in for dry, crinkling cigars in the little counter with its glass top smeared and pecked by the passing of many coins. The girls, seated at a table, were looking around with knowing eyes, only too glad to open up a conversation—especially before the meal was over. Frank mumbled an introduction and then discreetly withdrew.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Guy," said Tootsie.

They were introduced by their first names.

"Come on in; the water's fine," said Tootsie, unceremoniously. "I could eat a horse and chase the rider." And forthwith she began to display her prowess.

A waiter moved among the tables, shouting his orders through a hole in the wall. An unkempt face appeared at the hole, the top of an undershirt showed, disappeared; then a voice echoed among the pans. Over the room hung the smell of burnt food which never seemed quite to leave; on the walls were cheap advertising calendars with cardboard pockets for toothpicks.

Harlan approached the girls with his accustomed ease. He made a humorous and elaborate bow. "May I stoop so low without bending as to have the honor to sit at your table?"

"Surest thing you know," said Pal, and the two girls glanced at each other significantly. They were cheap and tawdry, their faces were painted, they were cold and calculating, but to Guy they were splendid. They were from out of town; from another world—the world which some day he would conquer. He would not always be tied down to a one-horse town, humdrumming along. No, he would live—see life.

He would not let Harlan get ahead of him; he put his hand on Tootsie's arm. "Some biceps," he said, with mock humor.

"Where do you get that stuff?" she asked, and shook herself free, then returned to her food.

Loungers peered through the windows. Some of

them came in, bought cigars, nipped off the ends, then pushed down the handle of the contrivance which lifted a match into place, all the time throwing out calculating glances, then went puffing into the night.

Guy began to realize that he would have to pay for the meal, and a cold feeling came over him. Why had he gotten into this? A moment before he had been so elated—and now the waiter in his spotted clothes was standing beside him, wetting the stub of a lead pencil with his tongue.

The waiter hesitated, then deposited the slips halfway between Tootsie and Guy.

"Here, give those to grandpa," said Harlan, with a flourish. For some comedy reason of his own he was now "grandpa." "Grandpa can't have his little girlies paying out money for some old waiter checks. How'd you ladies like to see the town? Grandpa's got his old bus outside."

As the car moved off the loungers in the shadows regarded the party silently; when the car was safely away one of the wits burlesqued the whole performance for the delight of the others.

Harlan was at his best. There was nothing he couldn't think of. He laughed and joked and "made out" that he was driving an old family horse.

"Whoa there, Bill! Whoa there!" he said, after they had driven around in the country for a time. "Whoa there, Bill!" He sawed at imaginary lines. "Whoa there, Hottentot!" This was good and he repeated it. "Here's my Hot and there's your Tot," he called to Guy, and put his arm around Pal. "Say,

Pal," he said at last, "let's leave this pair of doves here while we take a walk." He called back elaborately as they started away: "Be careful. Remember that a kiss is full of big, bad germs. We're going out to study the moon."

Guy and Tootsie were left alone. Guy's heart was beating fast; there was a dryness on his lips and when he spoke the words did not seem to come from him, but from some strange mechanical creature. He recalled that he was in the same car and in the same seat he had occupied with Bee a short time before. He felt that he ought to be ashamed of himself, but he wasn't. It was too exciting, too exhilarating. If he could make the first move he would be all right. Why couldn't he have Harlan's dash and go? He would try talking the way Harlan did. He moved nearer.

"Don't be so cold. Here's something to warm you." He put his arm around her waist. Tootsie drew away; his arm seemed paralyzed. If she would only ask him to do it it would be so much easier. "Look here what I got—another one." He put the other around her. "Isn't that funny, having two just alike?" He tried to laugh. "It fits well around the neck, too, don't it?" He remembered the billboard he had seen with a catch advertising phrase. He laughed heavily; he would use it again. "And here's something else—maybe it 'll fit, too." He started to kiss her.

"Say! you're getting kind of soft, ain't you?"

He drew back; he hadn't expected her to say anything like that. They never did that for Harlan. But he kept his arm around her. If she thought that

was all there was to him he would show her. She didn't realize how smart he was.

She probably thought that he was just an average pool-hall loafer or barber-shop hanger-on. If he could get her to admire him once, then it would be easier.

"I guess they're out looking at the moon," he began. "Just think how all the ancient peoples of the world—the Chaldeans, the Phœnicians, the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Etruscans"—he tried to think of more—"and so on, looked at the moon and talked about it and wrote poetry to it, even as you and I." That was a good phrase—it would show her that he knew the poem. "Do you know what the Latin people called it? Luna. Do you know what word we get from that?" He was thinking of "lunar" —it would show that he had studied Latin. She probably didn't know many young men who had studied a language like Latin. Now he was making some progress.

Tootsie looked at him curiously. "Loony, I guess," she said.

She laughed—squealed—and in spite of himself Guy had to laugh, too. As she laughed he made an awkward gesture. He felt her warm body under his hands and it stirred him profoundly. Never so completely had anything taken possession of him.

Again he grew serious. Why couldn't he be gay and carry it along as a joke, the way Harlan did? he asked himself. He rubbed his tongue over his dry lips.

He began to talk about the stars. "Did you ever stop to realize how far away some of those stars are?" He tried to make it impressive. "Take the sun, for

instance. You know, I got it all in our physical geography—the nebular hypothesis and everything. Do you realize that if the light from the North Pole went out at the time Columbus discovered America we wouldn't know it yet?" He was quite carried away by his subject. Little did she dream that he could talk that way. No doubt mention of the nebular hypothesis had made an impression on her. Now she would know that he was different from other young men.

"Cut it. What do you think you are—a college professor? Think of coming out with a guy and then him spouting for half an hour about the North Star! Give me a light."

She was the first girl he had ever seen smoke a cigarette; except sometimes for a prank. The deep, heavy sweetish smell made him hesitate; then something urged him on. He kissed her and patted her. How would he ever be able again to look Bee in the eyes? Oh, well, that would take care of itself. He drew Tootsie into his lap.

With a backhand toss she threw the cigarette into the road, where it lay for a moment, gleaming in a wagon track, then was gone.

"Did you ever hear the story about Johnny and the teacher keeping him after school?" asked Tootsie, and the coarse, suggestive story, coming from her lips, seemed almost unbelievable. She told others; Guy laughed politely, but a cold strangeness came over him. His arms loosened.

He would stop her from talking so. "Some day I am going to be somebody," he said; "a statesman of some kind."

She laughed a hard, mirthless laugh. "So that's what's the matter with you, is it, Loony! That's a good one—statesman! Lloyd George, I expect."

She continued to twit him; he began to draw away from her. That was something he couldn't bear—trifling with his most precious ambitions. He could tolerate her coarse stories, but this was holy ground.

"I think I'll get out and stretch my legs," he said.

"You seem to think you got a corner on legs. Well, you 'ain't." She waved hers. "Nothing loony about them, is there?"

In a moment Guy was running down the road lightly on his toes, making as little noise as possible.

After a time Tootsie began to honk: when Harlan came she was properly indignant.

"Say, that's a great side kick of yours you got. He said he wanted to stretch his legs and he gets out of here and I ain't seen him since. What do you think he wants to talk about?—about the North Star and debating and some kind of a hypothersis! What you mean handing me a lemon like that? I'm through. Lead me to the straw."

Guy cut across the fields, running, stooping, as if in some way he might be pursued. He crawled through barbed-wire fences, hurried past cows so quickly that they were unable to rise until he was on his way. The dew wet his shoes, horses blew their nostrils and went galloping to the far end of the pasture. He jumped over gullies. The farmers had put straw and manure in them and staked the sticky mire down to keep the soft, rich ground from washing. Water was still standing under the solid-looking top.

When he missed it went over his shoes. But he did not stop. He came to a long row of osage hedge—high, thick, and with great, murderous thorns. In this section there were miles and miles, reaching endlessly over the sweep of the hills. One might ride all day on the train and see no end of it. When the first settlers had come there were few trees and no stones, and they had planted osage hedge for fences. It grew high and rank; each year it must be cut to keep it from spreading beyond control. It was a coarse, wild growth. He ran along the high hedge, looking for a place to get through, The corn near it was withered, sickly, and yellow; its strength was sapped. He stepped on the yellow balls which slipped and slid beneath his feet—"mock oranges" they were sometimes called. When one broke, a thick, sticky white juice came out. In the fall the ground would be covered with them, great flies buzzing around. At last he came to a place where once an old gate had stood, and crawled through the boards and poles which had been set up to fill the opening.

Then he cut across the cornfield. The corn was now waist high and was softly stirring in the night breeze. Cultivators had gone along and thrown up their ridges. He could see the broad leaves of the milkweeds, and when in his haste he caught hold of one a sticky milk came out; catching hold of the blades of the corn, he tried to wipe it from his hands. He saw the deep green of the young cockleburs. How his father hated them—the endless burs which grew all over this section of the country. What an enemy in the fall. Then the burs clung to trouser legs

until they were covered; horses' tails would have to be put in bags to keep them from becoming a tangled, knotted mass. When the cattle were turned in on the stalks their tails would become hard and lumpy. Not until almost spring—long after the cattle had been taken out of the cornfields—would the last of the burs be gone from their tails.

At last he reached the edge of town where the cinder walks begin, but he kept to the middle of the street—it did not make so much noise. He turned down Buchanan Street. He found that he was in front of the Chew house. It was silent and shadowy; even Mr. Chew had gone to bed. Contrition smote him. Why had he almost done such an awful thing? he asked himself. He stopped running, slowed down to a walk, paused, and stood looking up at Bee's window. It was exciting to think what he had nearly done. What a shock it would be to Bee to know that he would even speak to such a low creature as Tootsie! If some one told Bee she wouldn't believe it. There was some satisfaction in thinking that he could know two girls so different; a little pride in his powers. Suddenly emotional tears stood in his eyes. He ought to be ashamed of himself for thinking such things. Bee was so far above Tootsie that it seemed hard to think of them as both being girls. He began to cry. Never again would he do such a thing. He was unworthy of such a sweet, inspiring girl as Bee. He climbed over the iron fence and crept toward her window, wiping away the tears with the back of his hand. Kneeling, he prayed. In his studies he had come upon the theory of evolution, and, fascinated, he had pursued it. The

Bible was mostly legend; it was not meant for modern conditions, but never a word of his belief did he tell his father. Mr. Chew was the kind of man to know—he thought things out for himself. But when Guy was least expecting it the belief of his father would take possession of him, at some exalted moment, when leaping thoughts told him that, after all, the Bible must be right; people couldn't have believed in it all these thousands of years if it were wrong. He looked up toward her window, folded his hands, and mumbled a prayer, half to God, half to Bee. His nose began to run and he snuffed softly. Why had he ever wavered? he asked. Bee was worth a hundred Tootsies; yes, a thousand! He wasn't worthy of her; she was so far above him. No such thoughts ever came to sweet, innocent, inspiring Bee. She was always good and great. He had forgotten that he had given her up. Only the present filled his mind. "Forgive me, Bee; forgive me, darlingest love," he whispered; then turning his face up to the sky he added, "For ever and ever. Amen."

There was a roar, a rush, and Bee's dog lunged at him. Guy was hardly able to get over the fence. He started down the street, breathing heavily; when he was safely out of reach, resentment rose in him. Why should he be so rudely set upon after such a great emotional moment? Why should he—just as he was praying to God and making the best resolve of his life—be chased by an old brindle bulldog? There wasn't any sense to life. One thing was certain, it didn't run straight and true, as once he had thought.

The next day Guy felt thoroughly ashamed of

himself. Why had he stooped to such coarseness? he asked himself. Such baseness? Why did he do such things? Others never seemed to have such struggles between right and wrong. Others seemed to be either all good or all bad. There was the presiding elder. At every quarterly conference he would come to Junction City and put up with the Plummers. On such occasions his father would be quietly excited and talk far into the night. Guy looked up to the presiding elder as being vaguely great and good.

All day Guy went about his duties with an exalted feeling. He would put the bad out of his nature forever. With detached aloofness he wrapped and measured and compounded the simple remedies and copied the prescriptions in the big yellow ledger. Soon he would be away from the stuffy, crummy little store and out into the great world where people did big and wonderful things. Once in a while he would come back and have a chat with the boys. No matter how high he rose, he would never get cocky. He hated that. He turned to the back part of the ledger, where among the yellow-ruled pages he kept a wrinkled newspaper clipping. It was the poem, "Oh, Why Should the Spirit of Mortal Be Proud?" Bee had given it to him during one of their deep talks; their souls had seemed to meet. "It was Lincoln's favorite," she had explained, and it seemed to be hallowed. He had liked to think of himself as being, somehow, like Lincoln. Lincoln had worked in a store; he had sold things behind a counter. Lincoln had debated; he himself had. Lincoln had studied law; soon he would do so.

"I'm going to learn it by heart," he had told himself in exaltation, and had started in faithfully; then finally had let it drop. Now he took it up again with renewed determination. He kept repeating the lines over and over to himself as he copied abbreviated Latin phrases in the ledger or helped some mentally tortured customer decide on a compound.

He had shown Bee his favorite poem, W. E. Henley's "Invictis." She had been greatly impressed when he intoned:

> "I thank whatever gods may be
> For my unconquerable soul."

And,

> "My head is bloody, but unbowed."

But best of all

> "I am the master of my fate
> I am the captain of my soul."

He would be captain of his own soul; Lincoln was. That was what people were put into the world for—to be captains of their souls. It was a wonderful and inspiring thought. He must tell Bee. And then he remembered his understanding with his father.

He began to feel provoked with himself. Why had he made such a promise? How lonesome it was working in a drug store. Nobody to talk to—that is, real talk. Fierce resentment rose up in him; his father had no right to extract such a promise. It wouldn't hurt him to talk to Bee, he told himself. He would call her up on the telephone and just say a few words. He started toward the telephone, revolving the words; then he paused and came back. He would live up to his agreement.

During the day the two show girls passed, switching and simpering along; a moment later they were followed by a laughing, expectant crowd. He turned away in disgust. How far above them now he seemed!

But the thought was harder to banish than he knew. All day he heard vague rumors; all seemed to know that there was "something in the air"—an enticing, intangible something. "I guess there's going to be something doing down to the theater tonight," said a customer, with a knowing wink. "Of course I don't know anything, but I ain't clean deef, dumb, and blind." He went tittering out with his lozenges.

"It won't hurt me just to look in," Guy told himself, when evening came. "I've seen everything, anyway."

Guy went, but was hardly prepared for what he saw. During a cheap, disgusting dancing scene there was a commotion, and Adrian Plummer, with his head erect and his lips grimly pressed, marched quickly down the aisle. Others rose, from all parts of the house. The music stopped, the girls stood staring a moment, then ran shrieking to the wings. Adrian Plummer climbed up the narrow flight of steps that led to the stage and spoke to the small, frightened manager of the show. He stood towering above the rattish creature, bony and square-shouldered.

"Shameless man, have you no heart? For a little gold you stoop to this. 'Even as I have seen, they that plough iniquity and sow wickedness, reap the same. Depart from me, ye that work iniquity, every one which heareth these words of mine.' Go quickly."

The sniffling manager started to protest, but others from the audience came clamoring up. An egg was thrown, striking a cheap stage set and running down in a dripping mess.

Guy sat a moment, stunned and surprised, then leaped to his feet, shouting. Such a show ought to be run out of town; snatching a turnip from the hands of one of the men, he hurled it at the stage.

There was a scuffle; the curtain was run down; a hubbub. Guy waited outside with the growing crowd until the members of the company came out, their faces still smeared with grease paint. Things were thrown, words bandied; finally the members of the company thrust themselves into the buses and rushed for the station. The crowd followed on their heels, clamoring. Guy jumped on the running board of Harlan's car, shouting the loudest of all.

Adrian Plummer paused among the empty baggage trucks of the station platform as the rear light of the train slowly winked out of sight. "Let us pray," he said.

The crowd started uptown, talking and laughing, but ahead of them Adrian Plummer moved silently and alone. The crowd thinned, many dropping into the brightness of Cod's place. Guy found himself walking by the side of his father. Abruptly his father reached out and took his arm in his. It was the first time that Guy could remember such an advance.

It was some moments before Adrian Plummer could speak; and when he did his voice was thick with emotion.

"I am so glad, my son, to see you on the side of the Lord. That pleases me more than all else."

"Yes, sir," said Guy; "they're the kind that ought to be run out."

He went to bed in a state of exaltation.

8

CHAPTER VII

THE following Friday evening there was a band concert. Guy had not seen Bee.

He waited eagerly for eight o'clock. It was his evening off and he told himself that he wanted to hear the music. For the first time the work in the store was drudgery; people coming in and out, the bumper of the door constantly striking, the sharp compression of air, and then slowly closing. Pills, cough drops, sponges, soft drinks, hat bleach, salts, anticolic nipples—the endless round continued.

At last the clock in the tower struck and he stripped off his white jacket, put on his coat, and went out into the street. The farmers had done their chores, put collars on their brown, creased necks, and now were looking for places for their cars in the long black line in the middle of the street. A car hardly stopped before some one bounced out and went streaking across the street; in a moment the person would be back with his hands filled with ice-cream cones. In one of the cars a man, evidently the father of the wife or husband, could not accustom himself to new-fangled ways. While the others were gobbling their cones he stretched out his leg, ran his hand into his trousers' pocket, and brought out his trusty clasp knife. He opened it with a thick brown thumb-nail and then complacently began slicing out bites. One by one he conveyed

them to his mouth, oblivious to the bustle about him.

There was a pleasant stir of expectancy; the people were in holiday mood. A hired man from a farm came galloping up on his pony, his coat over his arm. Tying his pony to the hitch rack, he removed his handkerchief from the back of his collar, put on his coat, and disappeared into a store. When he came out he was puffing at a cigar. He passed down the street, bent on an evening's pleasure. The next morning he would be up at five-thirty and out among the corn rows.

The members of the band had just received their new uniforms and were very proud of them. There was a great deal of stirring around, much passing to and fro to ask questions, many calls to friends in the audience. On the steps, where all could see it, was the drum. Printed on it in great black letters was "The Junction City Uniform Band." There was a soft tooting of the instruments as the men tried them, the blare of a horn.

One of the hired men imitated the sound. "So, boss," he called, making as if the sound had come from a cow during the process of milking. Laughter arose. It took little, in this pleasant period of expectancy, to be amusing.

Insects buzzed around the lamps; the shrill, monotonous whistle of the popcorn wagon arose; an electric sign winked on and off; cars honked; warnings were called as more cars tried to back in.

The band leader raised his baton; it poised a moment, rose again, made a circle, came down; they were off.

Guy edged restlessly through the crowd. People came out of their way to speak to him, waved to him, called to him. He went down one sidewalk and came up another. He lay for a moment on the grass, moved on again. He stopped before the popcorn wagon.

"Butter?" asked the man.

Mechanically Guy watched the molten yellow poured over the flaky grains, and then with the bag in his hand again set out down the street. But the corn was tasteless. He gave it to a boy and went to the fountain. Bending over, he pressed the handle; the water squirted about his mouth and he had the unpleasant sensation of being untidy. He wiped it away with the back of his hand; then the thought came to him, what if *some one* should see him make such an uncouth movement. Taking out his handkerchief, he dried his mouth properly.

"I am going to learn such things," he said to himself, and moved down the street.

"Hello, there!" some one called, as he was passing a long line of parked automobiles. He looked, and it was Charles G. Chew, sitting in his car. In the front seat was Ed, the man-of-all-work. "Have a seat."

Guy felt a nervous beating of his heart. Should he? What would his father say? He flashed a quick look; there was no one else in the rear seat. Hope rose and died; it was as he wished, and yet he had a feeling of disappointment. Chew opened the door. Guy looked around nervously. What if his father should see? But Guy knew there was no such likelihood. His father never went to concerts unless they were "sacred."

"I am going to get in with him," said Guy, fiercely, to himself. "Why shouldn't I? Am I not old enough to take care of myself?" What right had his old-fashioned, behind-the-times father to make such demands? he thought resentfully. As he looked at Chew, so much at ease, he could not help comparing him with his father at home, sitting in his rocking-chair, with his congress shoes beside him, reading the *Christian Herald*.

"All right," Guy heard himself saying. "I'll stop a minute."

He sank back into the luxury of the cushions.

"The music is good," said Guy. He had not thought whether it was good or not. In fact, he knew little about music; practically all that he had ever heard was church music. Occasionally, when some girl was graduated from the music department of the Normal, she gave a recital; tickets would be given his father, as pastor of the church, and sometimes Guy would go. But he rarely stayed it through. Now he found himself ardently praising the efforts of the hard-working young men.

"Yes, band music has its place," said Chew. "The flute has some good notes now and then."

Chew began to talk about music. There were references to orchestras, symphonies, chamber music, arias, grand opera. Chew loved music and had gone to Chicago to hear grand opera. It seemed astounding to Guy that one would travel so far just to hear music, but to Chew it seemed matter of fact. "If I didn't hear something good once in awhile I would get as depressed as a bride's omelette."

Suddenly to Guy the efforts of the band seemed small and inconsequential.

"Yes," returned Guy, "a band is all right for such as this." He waved his hand over the crowd dismissingly. "It has its uses. It keeps up local interest, civic pride, patriotism, or whatever you want to call it. As a whole, it ought to be encouraged." He was magnanimous toward the perspiring musicians. "But, of course, it isn't the real thing. Most people, you know, aren't educated up to the other. People *en masse* don't know much." He again indicated the unfortunates. He now seemed so far above them. He could not talk music with Charles G. Chew, but he could meet him on the common ground of intellectuality, he told himself. Guy began to feel more at ease; he had for the people idling in their cars and on the seats and benches a feeling of amused toleration. He could not help thinking what great advances he had made. Once he had been one of them; now he could meet the smartest man in Junction City as an equal. He watched with pleasure people come up and peer anxiously into the car, hoping that Chew would speak to them. But he had the lawyer's attention. He had an exultant feeling of satisfaction.

"It's remarkable how little, as a whole, the country knows," he heard himself saying. "The average man is numb from his shoulders up. All you got to do is to push 'em over and they're dead."

Guy grew enthusiastic over his new discovery about the human race. He enlarged upon it. And as he talked he began to feel as if the two outstanding exceptions to the universal rule which

he had so recently hit upon were himself and Mr. Chew.

"Look at evolution," continued Guy. "What does the average person know about Darwin or Alfred Henry Wallace? What does Auguste Compte mean to them?" He pronounced the first name as if it were a month, and the last name as if it had two syllables. "If you went out there and asked them who Compte was they would look at you in blank amazement." It was distressing that the people should not know. "Or Huxley, or Gladstone—just names to them, that's all." He rushed on in his new-found interest.

There was chatter, a laugh, and Bee stood before him. With her was Pearl Duncan. The two had been to the ice-cream parlor.

Guy looked at Bee with quickened feeling. He liked to study her minutely, going over every detail; and then when he had finished he liked to begin again. He looked at her hair waved over her ears, and at the skin showing so white in front of her ears, just where the hair left off. Her neck was so slender and white; behind were two cords with a slight depression between them. He followed the line of her shoulder, the soft, almost imperceptible rounding of her breast. A great desire to touch her came over him, and then he felt ashamed of himself. "What's the matter with me?" he said, fiercely, to himself. But it did not keep the desire from returning; he wanted to weave his fingers through the waves of her hair. She was laughing up at him, her white, regular teeth flashing into view. Then the red of her lips came down over them. He had heard of "Cupid's

bow" and looked to see where it was; he was not certain. It was wonderful to have such mystery, such enticing stimulation, near him. Sometimes with her delightful companionship she seemed like a splendid boy chum, and then suddenly a breachless wall arose. One moment she seemed so exquisite, so perfect, the next some shortcoming was apparent. He did not like the way she kept working her lips, moving them when there was no occasion to do so. A moment later it seemed merely a pleasant personal eccentricity.

"Papa, here's something for you. Now you've got to eat it." Bee held out an ice-cream cone.

There was much laughter, and at last Mr. Chew began to nibble at the doubtful confection.

Chew opened the door and Bee and Pearl got in.

A feeling of uneasiness swept over Guy; then he began to lull himself with excuses. It was all an accident that he was with Bee. He had just happened to come across Mr. Chew in his car; he did not know that Bee was at the ice-cream parlor. He began to feel that he was not at fault in anyway. Things would take care of themselves. He would have a good time. He soon began to laugh and talk.

"Look at him flourishing his baton," said Guy, indicating the leader, who was going through a particularly spirited passage.

"You were doing the same thing the other night with a drum stick. Look, Pearl." Bee mimicked his flourishes for Pearl's amusement.

It now seemed ridiculous that they should have eaten in the band stand. Both at the same time told Pearl about it, breaking in on each other, interrupt-

ing, heedless of the warning glances thrown at them. Mr. Chew raised a hand, but the three were unable to contain themselves. In the words of Junction City, they had the "giggles."

Chew turned to them smilingly. "I think we should get out of here. Ed, you'd better give us a chance to cool down."

The big car moved out easily and rolled down the street. Guy felt the luxury of it—the long car so softly rushing by the houses. It left the vitrified-brick pavement and glided onto the soft dirt road. Houses became fewer; dark farm buildings began to appear—already the tired workers had gone to bed. Cows stirred in the lots; silos stood out in the pale light, windmills turned slowly; rabbits crossed the road; culverts rushed by. They came to a wooden bridge; there was a roar, a rattle of loose boards, and the bridge was far behind. But the driving was hard; the rutted roads jolted them, bounced them. They were soon covered with a film of dust. Tall horseweeds lashed against the car. Sharp corners rushed to meet them; on each side was the high osage hedge. Later in the summer the balls would fall and roll across the road; they would sqush under the wheels and the car would slip. Now the rank weeds were high enough to cut off all view. Ed honked, and horses in the field suddenly raised their heads, blew their nostrils, and went galloping away. In the spring when the rain was falling the roads were almost impassable; great hunks of mud rolled up on the wheels and farmers, stopping their wagons, climbed down and punched it free with sticks. The mound would show for months.

The three quieted down; Pearl and Bee sang snatches of songs. The simple tunes thrilled Guy. He could not sing a note, and he looked at the white-bobbing patch, which was Bee's face, with new awe.

There was a bump, and they flew up in the car; a wild wagging. They had hit a washed-out culvert.

Chew roused himself from thought. "What this section of the country needs more than anything else," he said as they rearranged themselves, "is transportation. The railroads aren't enough. We need to get from one city to another. This is the center of the corn belt. Look at all that." He waved his hand over the low hills, which swept on and on endlessly. Once they had been covered with prairie grass and still to be found were buffalo wallows. Now rows of corn, some a mile long and as straight as the flight of a bullet, came up to the edge of the road. During the day teams toiled up and down the rows, the man with his lines buckled over his shoulders, his eyes on the rich dark green corn flowing monotonously under the arch of his cultivator. Sometimes he gave a kick with his foot as a shovelful of dirt rolled heavily against a stalk of corn, and then freeing it without stopping the team, again caught his stride. Sometimes he bent over and with a quick snatch pulled a cocklebur from the row; then on again, day after day. In the fall he shucked it, with great high throwboards on the wagon, the ears twisting and whirling through the air with white ribbons fluttering. The corn was then fed to the stock, or taken to box cars waiting on the siding and dumped through the traps. The long winter—spring—and then the round of the corn began again.

"These people raise the corn for the whole country. They work hard and yet they are virtually prisoners. The roads are their jailers. They have automobiles, but the roads are so poor, so rutted, that they can go only a few miles. They need macadam roads so they can take their families and go to the cities and break the monotony of life. The cities need to be linked up with automobile highways. I only wish I could bring some such blessing to Junction City." Chew sighed.

Guy was struck with the truth of it; he had not seen it in its larger scope before. For a moment he had an intense feeling about it, then it was gone. He was too much interested in himself to think about the advantages of automobile highways.

In regaining his position after his bounce, his hand touched Bee's. He drew it away quickly.

When they came back the concert was over; the musicians were returning to the hall; cars were scuttling off into the night; pieces of paper were blowing about; the hired hands' ponies were drooping at the racks, heads down, one hip higher than the other.

At Pearl's house they let her out; there were words of good night, laughter, and Ed turned the car toward the Chew home. What a splendid evening it had been! Guy could not help contrasting it with his last automobile ride. How far above Tootsie Bee was! A sudden contrition hit him, a great humility overcame him. He was not, he told himself, good enough to speak to Bee.

"Well, this looks like the old homestead," said Chew as they turned into the drive which wound in

and out before it finally reached the steps. Guy had often wondered why the drive had not gone straight, and when he found that it was a part of the landscape effect he was astonished. It was the first time he had ever heard of such pains. It had made him marvel for days. "If you will excuse me, I think I'll shuffle off these poor habiliments."

Chew went upstairs without a word of warning to Bee. Any mother in Junction City would have extracted a promise from Bee to "come in soon."

"Let's sit out in the lawn swing awhile," said Bee. "We always seem to be sitting out somewhere, don't we?"

"I'll need my drumstick," said Guy, and they laughed. Any reference to the drumstick now seemed funny. It was their own little joke, and in some mysterious way it seemed to draw them nearer to each other—to shut out the rest of the world.

By pressing their feet on the bottom boards the swing was made to move back and forth. Soon they were pleasantly swinging.

"Isn't it a wonderful night?" asked Guy. Before this he had scarcely noticed it. "Look at the stars."

"You pick out your favorite star and I'll pick out mine," said Bee.

They searched through the narrow scope of the heavens visible to them from their seats.

"Which is yours?" asked Guy.

Bee told him.

"Why, that's mine, too!" exclaimed Guy. It seemed wonderful that both should choose the same star.

"What is your favorite color?" asked Bee.

"Blue."

"That's mine, too," said Bee. And again both felt the wonder of it.

"We have about the same tastes in everything," said Guy. There was a long discussion of tastes.

Guy took up the stars again. "Doesn't it make you feel small, Bee, when you think how far away some of those stars are? Do you know that if the North Pole star had gone out at the time Columbus discovered America that we wouldn't know it yet?" They both marveled at it. It was pleasant to feel so small and somehow necessary to each other. "And do you realize that there are other suns there so much bigger than our own that ours would be consumed in them in a short time?"

Bee was impressed. Guy was upon his favorite theme—the greatness of the heavens and the smallness of man.

"I like to hear you talk about such things," said Bee.

Guy felt a thrill of triumph rise within himself. How different she was from Tootsie! He felt a sudden repugnance against the coarse show girl. By comparison, how great and glorious and wonderful Bee seemed! He talked at length about the stars, but in his mind another conversation was going on. It was about Bee. She was the one girl in the world for him. After all, he thought, there was something to the poet's idea that in the world there was just one other perfect mate, and he had found her. Her mystery and charm swept over him with a deeper hold. If he could only put his arm around her, crush her to his breast, bite her. Then he felt ashamed of

himself. What an absurd idea! He thought he had thrust it aside. No, it was her bright eager mind that he loved. . . . He continued to talk about the stars.

"I wonder if the souls of people don't go up there," said Bee.

They discussed it. In the seclusion of his own thoughts Guy had definite ideas about the soul and the spirit; there was no such thing, in the commonly accepted sense of the word, but now with the fragrance of Bee upon him it seemed possible. In his ecstasy, he had a flash of himself and Bee dying and going to some star together and there continuing to exist endlessly. It was a pleasant thought.

But wherever the conversation went, it always came back to themselves. They were of greater interest than all the stars put together.

Guy felt a dryness in his mouth. For half an hour he had been debating with himself whether or not to say it. Now he managed to stammer:

"You looked awfully—well, sweet to-night, Bee, standing there by the auto."

It was the first compliment he had ever paid her.

"Do you think so? You mean my clothes?"

"I didn't notice your clothes at all. I mean," he started to say "your face," but that seemed too bold —"well, everything—your expression. I don't care for beauty in the commonly accepted form," said Guy, with conviction. "Girls and pictures and movie actresses which other people think are so handsome, lots of times I don't think much of." He had a fleeting feeling that "handsome" was not the right word; "pretty" would have been better. He was so anxious to use the proper word.

"What type of beauty do you like best?" asked Bee.

Guy hesitated. "Well, I don't know. There are so many kinds." Then he began to describe his ideal. It soon became evident that it was an embellishment of Bee. Both knew it, but neither put it into words. There was so much that was not said; so much that was left to be inferred; each was probing the other's mind, drawing deductions, reaching conclusions without in any way indicating it.

Guy's knee touched Bee. He removed it quickly and there was a moment's awkwardness. He felt his heart quicken.

"I think you have a pretty hand," he said, and then after a moment added, "too."

"Do you?" She held up her hand.

"Your fingers are so shapely." He caught hold of one; there was a wild beating of his heart and he felt himself swallowing. "I suppose being a pianist does it."

"Peeanists usually have thick, blunt fingers," she said.

She had not noticed the correction of his pronunciation of "pianist," but to him the mistake seemed catastrophic. "How far above me she is!" he said to himself. In school, during the preparation of the graduation ceremonies and through their minor contacts he had always felt himself superior; a calm confidence in himself, but now he did not seem worthy even to be in her presence. In a few minutes he managed to pronounce it correctly.

He was clinging to her finger. He took hold of her hand. How small, birdlike and fragile it seemed!

Now that he had hold of it, confidence began to return. After a few moments it seemed natural that he should be holding her hand. He was soon patting it between his own.

He began examining the swing. "Will it go all right if two people sit on the same side?" He made a pretense that it in no way concerned themselves.

"Sometimes daddy and I do."

"I believe this corner is sinking," he said and examined one of the supports. It was in no way endangered. When he came back he stood by her side, then leaned against the seat, all the time talking. Finally he sat down. It was a close fit. He hesitated a moment and then reached for her hand; she withheld it, but finally gave it over to him. He put his arm on the back of the seat, touched her collar lightly, then moved one finger quickly across her shoulder, pretending that it was an accident. Then he rested his hand on her shoulder. Both began to whisper, leaning closer and closer to each other. At last he put his arm about her. A delirious joy passed over him. He was astonished at himself, elated; now that she had come into his arms, he could not give her up. He wanted to kiss her.

They continued to whisper.

The town clock struck midnight.

"Good gracious! It doesn't seem like we have been here a minute!"

They both marveled at the shortness of time.

"I must streak it home or your dad will kick me off the lot," he said.

"Fancy daddy doing a thing like that!"

"You know, that's what they always say," he

said. "When the world believes a thing is so, then you can pretty near bank on it not being so. Look at evolution. Look at mad dogs. The other day I was reading that there is really no such thing as rabies."

Guy continued to pity the ignorance of the world at large.

"Think of us ending up talking about mad dogs!" exclaimed Bee.

Both laughed; it was ridiculous.

"By the way," said Bee, "I am thinking about having a 'hard-times' party. Would you like to come?"

Such parties were current in Junction City, at which all sought to wear their oldest and most amusing clothes. One was sure to have a good time.

Guy hesitated. At Bee's house! But in his high state of elation it seemed easy. "Why, yes, I can" he said. "Thank you."

It seemed to them that they could never stop talking; one thing so led into another. Guy began to wonder, in parting, if he dared kiss her. His head buzzed.

"Good night," said Bee, unexpectedly, and held out her hand.

He found himself shaking her hand formally and a moment later was on his way down the winding drive. It was all over so quickly that he hardly realized it. He yearned for more of her sweetness.

CHAPTER VIII

GUY could hardly wait until the night of the "hard-times" party. He went over and over the clothes he should wear. At last he decided to go as a "rube."

A "lightning-change artist" who had come to Junction City on the lecture bureau had done an imitation which had amused Guy hugely. The man passed behind a screen and when he came into view again he was dressed as a farmer, with an old corn-cob pipe in his mouth and his hair sticking out the top of his hat. In a monotone he had sung a comic song, the only lines which Guy could remember were, "I'll be switched; the hay ain't pitched." Guy added to them; he would make himself the hit of the evening. And then he began to indulge in long conversations—they always ended with himself talking to Bee.

But there was the store—the unending drudgery—and the half promise he had made his father. Clouds rose on his horizon. He was resentful. Was life this way? he asked himself. Was something always nagging you and worrying you? Why couldn't things run along nicely and smoothly as they did in books? Then somebody entered the store and passed a jest; Guy felt better. The world was very desirable.

When Guy arrived the house was ablaze with lights and the sound of merry greetings came floating out

to him. At sight of Bee he received a shock. She was dressed as a fortune-telling gypsy. Could this strange, outlandish creature be the person he had held in his arms. Then laughter arose.

There was a commotion and the merrymakers rushed to the door.

"Hay foot, straw foot," boomed a voice, and up the front walk came Harlan Thompson with Pearl Duncan. "Please give the poor dime a cripple," he called in begging imitation. Tying a string to Pearl, he pretended that she was a monkey. He was quite the life of the party.

The evening proceeded. Bee was called upon to "oblige" at the piano, and as she sat playing, reaching over to cross hands with a discriminating flourish, Guy thought he had never seen anything so bewitching. The music moved him; he floated along on his dreams. How far above him she seemed! What could she see in a chump like him, anyway? He would cherish her always. If she died first he would come, some dark night, and commit suicide on her fresh grave. Then they would be together in some other world . . . or would they? Yes, they must, or why should it be given to two persons to love each other so? That was a big idea! He *did* have big ideas. Some day, somehow, he would give expression to them. People would shout his name, banners would be borne in the streets, great dinners would be given in his honor. Turning, he would put his hand on her silvered hair and say, "You are honoring the wrong person; here is the one."

He joined in the applause that followed Bee's playing, and when Harlan horribly burlesqued her

effort he could hardly refrain from tossing him into the street.

One of the features of the evening was provided by the guests bringing their baby pictures, which, by means of a parlor lantern, were projected on a screen for the edification of all. Paper and pencils were distributed, and a prize was to be awarded to the person identifying the largest number of pictures. Guy took his paper eagerly; he would show Bee how much cleverer he was than the other young sprouts around town.

As the queer, old-fashioned pictures were flashed on the sheet, gales of laughter rose; over the wildest shrieks Harlan's witticisms could be heard. Finally the machine clicked and a picture came on of a baby in a huge hand bowl, its fat hands and legs flowing over the sides. There was a moment's silence and then a round of banter met it. Why did people insist on having babies taken in such absurd and ridiculous postures? From some movement on the part of Mr. Chew, who was operating the machine, Guy knew that it was Bee. A queer hot, shocked feeling ran over him. Was this impossible, naked thing the glorious and wonderful Bee? He felt that he must look at the gurgling, chubby lump, although in some indefinite, indescribable way it seemed profaning her. He looked and felt a curious, glowing tingling. What were her legs like now? The thought flashed over him and he felt ashamed of himself. Even in his most sacred and golden moments with her he liked to catch fleeting glimpses of the graceful suggestion of her legs, yet he always felt ashamed of himself. The Bible offered no compromise to those who had

such thoughts. Even though the thoughts were locked in the fastness of his bosom, he knew that he had them. He could not get away from himself. Others might not suspect, but he knew, and if the Bible were true. . . . but he was coming to think less and less of the Bible. It was not for people who understood history. His father was of another generation; that was all. All people had once thought thus. It was now the fashion to break away. And then his eyes came back to the dimpled suggestiveness.

Inserting his finger in his mouth, Harlan gave an imitation of an infant demanding food.

"Shut up!" snapped Guy. "Haven't you got the sense of a nanny goat?"

But Harlan, lost in his imitation, gave no heed.

When the picture was taken off, Guy could not look in the direction of Bee. Would he ever be fit and decent—good enough for her?

He marked the picture as being that of Pearl Duncan and was surprised, at the end of the contest, to find that Dessie Arnhalt had won. People he didn't believe in at all were always doing surprising things. Life seemed more difficult than he had thought.

Before the evening was over Guy was called upon to make a speech. This was his chance; he would make Bee and Mr. Chew proud of him. In the name of the assembled guests he thanked Bee and her father for the wonderful evening, and then in a moment had them laughing with his references to the baby pictures. And while they were yet laughing he lowered the lights and swung off into "The

Raven." At a Chautauqua he had heard an entertainer tell how he had studied the poem for fifteen years and still each day found some new vocal possibilities in it. It had impressed Guy and he had set himself to its study. Now when he finished he had produced the desired effect. Even Harlan was sitting motionless on the floor. Guy felt a glow of triumph. It was splendid to have such power—to make people laugh or weep as he wished. He looked proudly at Bee among the sofa cushions. Possibly, after all, he was good enough for her.

Leaping to his feet, Harlan burlesqued the first line with horrible ravings and struggles at his collar, but small appreciation greeted his humorous outburst.

Guy moved in hazy deliciousness; he could move mountains; his day was coming; they would see.

He lingered until after the others had gone. Mr. Chew, lazily opening his collar at the stairs, yawned:

"You have quite a gift that way, haven't you? I used to do some spouting myself."

Guy staggered. Spouting! Was that what his great ability was called!

Didn't Mr. Chew see what it was going to amount to some day? How hard people were to understand! The very person who should have appreciated it most had yawned. But Guy wouldn't let on.

"It has some good tonal effects," he said.

If Mr. Chew was impressed he gave no outward evidence, for he continued hauling at his collar.

"They don't do it much any more," he said, and, yawning afresh, vanished up the stairs.

Alone with Bee, Guy felt no such damper. The delicious haze was still about him. He had yearned

all evening to be with her unhampered, and now that it was accomplished, he was uneasy and embarrassed. What a strange and different person she seemed! He had difficulty in finding something to talk about.

Before they were alone together a thousand things had come to him that he wished to say; now he could steal only hungry glances.

They talked about school, about the hot test tubes, and they laughed at Guy and the drumstick, but now it didn't seem so funny. Guy moved about the drawing-room, which now showed the tumbled effects of the party. Guy felt the soft rugs under his feet, he looked at the paintings on the wall, his fingers touched the rich curtains. He became uneasy and wanted to go home.

Bee was sitting curled up in a large upholstered chair, her chin in her hands, watching him.

"Let's make some fudge," she said.

"Fine! Let's do."

They went to the kitchen; soon they were talking easily, laughingly hunting for the utensils. Bee tried to put on a large kitchen apron, but experienced some difficulty.

"Let me hold it," said Guy, and as he drew it about her shoulders a thrill passed over him. It was stirring to be so close. His fingers hovered over her, touched her. How slender and delicate she was! Even the texture of her skin seemed different from his. A fresh feeling of humility came over him. What could such a wonderful creature see in him? he asked.

As they talked of other things, a little song kept singing itself to him. What a wonderful being she was—so sweet, so angelic. How lovely she looked in

just a plain gingham apron! He saw visions of another home with her moving about in it, bringing grace, sweetness, and charm. The vision was almost irresistible. What a splendid home it would be!—not a monotonous, commonplace, humdrum one like his father's and mother's. He continued to build air castles.

"Give me one, too," he said, and an apron was found for him. It made them laugh. He never remembered having a better time.

Laughing and calling back and forth, they brought out the spirit lamp and set the flame going.

Abruptly Bee lifted her face to him. "You may kiss me," she said.

Guy was astonished; it was the most wonderful thing he had ever heard said. Sometimes he had dreamed of her saying such a thing, and now it was actually true. There was a drumming in his ears and he swallowed heavily.

"I would like to," he said, his heart beating wildly.

"Do it, then."

He put his arm about her lightly and kissed her hair.

She drew down his face and kissed him on the lips. His heart bounded and he threw his arms about her. He trembled and kissed her again. There was a sweet ringing in his ears.

She withdrew from his embrace. It was some moments before either spoke. When they finally found words they began to talk of other things.

At last the fudge was done and, going into the drawing-room, they began to eat the confection, sitting across from each other. As they ate they looked into each other's eyes.

They made no reference to what had happened in the kitchen.

"I think you were just splendid to-night at the piano," he said, at last.

"I wasn't as good as you. I could just feel things creeping up and down my ba—spinal column."

After a time she sat down on the sofa.

A dull hunger rose in Guy's heart to be with her. He looked at the vacant place beside her, but he could not force himself to move into it. He began to curse himself. He remembered what Cod had said at the pool hall: "A fellow who takes a girl out more 'n a couple of times without getting his arm around her hasn't much of the old hickory in him." He had always heard similar statements, sometimes in one guise, sometimes in another. His mind had been fired many times by the possibilities, but now he resented such slights. Such words were never for the beautiful, spirituelle Bee, he told himself. Fierce resentment rose up against Cod and his tribe. They were the scum of the earth.

He began to talk about the pictures. "I like this one," he said, indicating a landscape. "It's got good feeling."

It was a phrase he had picked up as applied to pictures and he used it. He turned his head from side to side and walked back from the picture. Then abruptly he sat down on the edge of the sofa, elaborately pretending to examine the painting.

"Which one do you like?" he asked.

"That one."

"So do I," he exclaimed.

They again marveled at how alike they were. By

common impulse they fell to whispering. It shut out the whole world. Soon they were talking about themselves—that fascinating subject. They started on many other things, but always came back to themselves. Their own delicious mystery grew upon them.

They gossiped.

"Wasn't it a stunner Dessie Arnhalt winning that prize?" asked Guy.

"Yes, and she felt as proud as a peacock, too," said Bee. In a moment they were discussing Dessie's beaus.

"Well, I wouldn't be one of them for anything," said Guy, firmly.

"Does your father still think she is so wonderful?" asked Bee.

"I don't know what he thinks and I don't care. I'll do my own thinking, thank you."

They continued.

If he could only bring himself to touch her. He could feel his throat contracting and a moisture in the palms of his hands.

"Wasn't that a perfectly horrid picture of me?" she asked. "I didn't want to show it, but nothing else would do dad. He's always dragging it out."

"Why, no! I thought it was all right. Just think! those little chubby arms are now these." He made a vague motion in her direction.

"Dad calls them skinny." She drew up her sleeves exposing their enticing whiteness.

"I think they are just about right," Guy said and felt the rough bluntness of it. "Look how much bigger mine are." They compared arms. "I can't begin to reach around mine."

"I can't, either, around mine."

It seemed marvelous that their arms should be so different.

Now was his chance. Should he say it or not?

"I wonder if I could reach around yours." He was able to get it out at last.

She gave no reply, and hesitatingly he reached out and put his fingers around her arm.

"I can make it with my middle finger. You tell your dad you aren't skinny at all—no, you needn't." They both laughed. "I like them." And bending over he kissed the hollow of her arm.

He could feel his heart beating heavily—a curious and detached part of him.

"Yes, I like them very much. I like both of them." Bending over he kissed the other.

"I even like this little alabaster neck." He rested his forehead in her neck. It was foolish saying alabaster—he had seen it many times in poems—but now for some reason or other it seemed all right.

"You mustn't do that."

He straightened up quickly. "Of course. I am ashamed of myself. I don't know what comes over me, sometimes. Really, I am awfully sorry, little girl. You know I wouldn't harm you for anything in the world. I would rather lose my right arm." He displayed the threatened member.

"I was reading my Longfellow again last night," she said, "and I came across that letter you wrote me asking me to go to the Moberly debate and in it was the first poem you ever sent me—'The Psalm of Life.' There it was—your Longfellow poem in my Longfellow book."

It seemed wonderful.

"There's hardly a day that goes by that I don't say it over to myself," he said, extravagantly. "The one I like best is:

> "In the World's broad field of battle,
>   In the bivouac of Life
> Be not like dumb-driven cattle!
>   Be a hero in the strife!"

He proclaimed it with some effect. Leaning over quickly she kissed him, and in an ecstasy whispered: "My hero! That's what you are—my hero!"

He took her into his arms and held her closely, and ran his fingers through her hair. His dream was coming true—and it was more glorious that it had seemed.

"Here's something else I believe in, too," he said. Some time before at a Chautauqua lecture he had heard a passing entertainer repeat it and it had taken hold of him:

> "The harder you're thrown the higher you bounce.
>   Come up with a smiling face.
> It's nothing against you to fall down flat,
>   But to lie there—that's disgrace!"

"I think that true, very true," she whispered, "and so funny."

They both laughed. A moment before—in the midst of Longfellow's mournful numbers—they were so serious, so sober, and now they were laughing. Guy peered down into her eyes. What good times they could have together!

"That's what I think life is," he said. "Just ups and downs—only more ups. That's the nice part of

it. Now I must call you something. I will call you my sweetheart." It was the first time the word had passed his lips. She drew his eyes down and kissed them. Yes, he was in love with her—devotedly, madly.

There was no doubt about it.

In moving his hand he touched her breast and a queer, appalling numbness came over him. Both sat still some moments, in silence. Then his throat contracted audibly, and quickly he cleared it. No reference was made to the accident.

"Come on," he said, abruptly, "let's go and take a walk. We can slip out."

They could not keep off the subject. Whatever else they started, they came back to themselves;—to love. There was so much to say, such small time to say it in, such golden, stimulating silences. They talked about other things, but both were thinking about marriage. They approached it. They came to its edge—and then skirted it. In a few moments it would again be back in the conversation. But both understood; as yet it was impossible. There were their parents. Guy trembled as he thought what would happen if his father even suspected that he was in the company of the daughter of the heretic. Guy must go to college, be educated. His father must make up enough money to send him through. He could not pull away from his father. And there was that promise. He put the thought aside hastily.

They walked down characterless State street. The cement slabs sagged up and down, drawn and contorted by the rigors of winter. Overhead was the

faint singing of the telephone wires, while tied to the poles were the impatient horses of a few of the farmer boys who had ridden in for the wonders of an evening at the candy kitchen. One of the horses was gnawing at a splintered pole.

"Whoever did that ought to know better than to tie him to a pole that hasn't any protection on it. Some people don't seem to use their heads at all."

He disposed of the careless farm boy. He seemed so in command of the world.

"Does it hurt anything?" she asked.

"It sure does—the horse, I mean. If he gets to sucking wind it'll give it colic. Then they'll have to give it some chloral hydrate." He liked to display his knowledge. Seeing that she was impressed, he went into a lengthy dissertation on diseases of the horse. He was glad of the days he had spent on the farm and of his knowledge of drugs. It was wonderful to have a person who appreciated brains.

"Good gracious!" he laughed, "Here I have been spouting my head off about ole horses and their diseases! Isn't that a good one? And all the time we might been talking about ourselves—I mean about you. Really, there ain't much to say about myself. I was just born and some day I suppose I will die. There's only one thing left." He squeezed her arm.

The streets were growing silent; the "White Way" was turned off, leaving only a few scattered globes. The whistle on the popcorn wagon in front of the candy kitchen ceased its shrill insistence and the man went trundling the affair heavily down the street.

"I like the town best at this time of night," she said.

"So do I," he returned. enthusiastically. "It sort of belongs to us."

How alike they were in everything!

"One's real growth doesn't come from mixing up with a lot of people," Guy explained, "but, from communing with your soul."

Harlan wouldn't know what he was talking about, he thought.

He looked at her curiously. Was this girl walking along so sedately at his side the one he had held in his arms a few minutes before?—it couldn't have been more than five!—and whose warm flesh he had felt under his hand? Now she seemed worlds removed. Would he ever be able to bring himself to the point where again he could put his arms around her? People seeing them would think that they were just an everyday, ordinary couple going down to the ice-cream parlor; they didn't know that just a few minutes before the two had been in heaven. Such people didn't know the meaning of deep, violent, stirring love; they just dragged along from day to day, eating and sleeping and yawning, after a while to die. That was all.

How strange life was! How exciting! It was wonderful just to be alive. And to be so smart.

The world seemed curiously removed, as if surveyed through the wrong end of a spyglass. The people seemed dwarfed and insignificant, going on small and puny errands.

Mankind amused him. He was a remote and impersonal god sitting on some aloof throne looking down on a droll play.

It would not take him long to conquer such a small and disordered world, especially with Bee as his inspiration. He would bring it and lay it at her feet. They would grow old together; that was a beautiful thought—like the advertising-calendar picture of the stately old man and the silver-haired lady, both so handsome and so well dressed, holding hands and smiling so tenderly at each other in the afternoon of life. Browning was right; the best of life was to be.

He wished he could remember it all; so he could quote it to Bee. Why hadn't he studied more earnestly in high school? But no matter, he would from now on. He had so many elusive thoughts—thoughts which couldn't be expressed in words.

They passed a dilapidated horse and buggy standing before one of the hitching posts on the south side of the Square.

"I see old man Hardesty is tanking up again," he said. "The old fool is everlastingly lit." He disposed of him; he was nobody.

She took hold of his arm and he leaned toward her deliciously; then he caught her hand.

"I think the biggest thing in life is for a couple to grow old together," he said. "Look at Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning. I don't suppose anybody ever loved each other more than they did. Of course they argued—naturally any couple would, some—but they would sit when they were having an argument and hold each other's hand, tears streaming down their faces. I wish we could be that way."

There were tears in his eyes. But she did not see

them; so he wiped them away elaborately. He felt her grip tighten on his hand.

"Robert Browning's poem, 'The Best of Life Is Yet to Be,' has been running through my mind all evening. It seems to haunt me. Could you come down to the room in the drug store? I have it there at the head of my bed. I think it would have a new meaning—to-night."

He paused before an alley. On it the back door of the Owl Drug Store opened, and in the rear of the drug store was the emergency room where, on occasion, Guy slept waiting late calls. When the night bell rang he would turn on the light and answer the door.

"I—I don't think it would be right."

"Nobody would see us. I mean, we wouldn't be trying to hide anything. It would be just to get the book."

"I suppose I could stand outside."

They went down the littered way.

He opened the door and fumbled along the wall till he came to the switch.

"It isn't much of a hang-out. Nobody ever takes care of it—they just let things go. You know how men are." He laughed pleasantly. "Nobody ever had books here till I brought mine. You know how the average person is."

Bee peered into the mystic region. "Boys are queer, aren't they?"

"Why?"

"No girl would want to stay in here."

They discussed "queerness" and then turned to look intently at each other, as if trying to peer into

each other's souls. But the inexplicable curtain could not be drawn aside.

"I'd think you'd be afraid," said Bee with a delicious little shiver. "Don't you ever hear things?"

Guy laughed commandingly. "If I heard anything I'd go and see what it was, that's all."

"Who's that?" she asked, pointing to an engraving of an impressive old-school gentleman with his fingers between the pages of a book, quite out of place on the bare boards of the wall.

"I was rummaging around among some of dad's old things in the garret one day and found it. It's John C. Calhoun, the great orator and statesman. It seems strange that dad would have a thing like that kicking about, doesn't it?"

"Are you keeping it because you think some day you'll be !——"

"No," he laughed, deprecatingly, "not altogether You'd be surprised to see what's behind it."

She came in timidly. When she looked it was a stovepipe hole.

Side by side they stood looking at the yellow engraving. There was much to talk about.

"They don't do good work like that any more," said Guy.

In reality, he did not know whether they did or not. It was a reflection of his father's, who confidently thought that the day of the well-done thing was over.

"Look at all those fine lines. People don't do such work nowadays."

They laughed deprecatingly. They understood people.

Their hands touched, and in a moment he was holding her tightly. He freed her for a moment and shut the door, all but a small crack. "Some gawk might pass by and rubber in," he said.

"I must go," she said, and fluttered toward the door.

He entwined his arms about her. "Stay just a moment," he pleaded. "Make it two moments for good measure," he said, and laughed. His mind was straining for something to say. "Did you hear what the new suit of clothes said?" he asked.

"No, what?"

"'If you rain on me, I'll shrink on you.'"

They laughed and he cudgeled his mind for other witticisms.

Sitting down on the one chair, he drew her into his lap. Now that they were alone and could say what they pleased, how entrancing she was! He drew his fingers along her cheeks. How smooth! He rubbed the tips of her fingers on his own; there was a slight rustling of a beard.

"I'll just close the door," he said, "and put this shade over the light."

He adjusted the shade hastily. It was a cheap, red advertisement given by some passing drummer with a constipation cure flaunted across its conical side. Sight of the offensive words made him grow warm. Why had he ever mentioned anything about the light? Dunce! Never again would he let such a thing come into the store. There ought to be a law against it.

It seemed epochal.

On the wall was a suggestive picture which Cod

had given him, showing a girl dressing before a mirror. In the position in which Bee was sitting on his lap she could see the picture. Guy felt her cool in his arms; a foot reached out to get down. He thought wildly how he could keep her.

Bee sniffed. "Where did you get that fine lady?"

"Oh, that," said Guy, with what was meant to be a grunt of disgust, "was left here by the fellow ahead of me. I'll tear it down."

He twisted the unfortunate lady into a knot and threw her on to the floor, then spitefully kicked her under the bed.

It was some moments before he could get Bee's mind off the unhappy incident. He began to make resolutions to himself. Never again would he have anything to do with such pictures. Never. A wild thought flashed through his mind of going to Cod and of getting him to strip all such pictures from his walls. But soon his mind was back to Bee.

"I love you so," he whispered. It was splendid to have his emotions so stirred. Never had he known such divine intoxication. He looked at her with awe. Was it possible that this slip of a creature in his arms was able to stir him so completely? he thought. How delicious the world seemed.

He kissed the depression between the cords on the back of her neck. It thrilled him. Once they had seemed as remote as the stars; now they seemed almost to belong to him.

They sat for some moments in intimacy.

"I think you are just wonderful, my hero," she whispered.

"No, I'm not. I'm just a plain, ordinary, every-

day dub; you're the wonderful one, sweetheart dear. Do you remember that funny poem about when you were a pollywog and I was a tadpole? Don't you think it's that way with us?"

Swinging her heels, she repeated the verse.

They laughed.

"I like comical things," she said. "I'd just like to go through life laughing that way."

"There's no reason why we shouldn't," he assured her. "We'll go through laughing together, my 'ittle ickle polly."

Softly their laughter mingled and the world seemed to recede even farther. It was stirring to be able to cry one moment and laugh the next. But that was the way life was—a little of both.

As he talked he tapped her lightly on the shoulder. He could see the faint outlines of a bow beneath her waist—he yearned to touch it. At last, he began to pull at the bow, gently. Each pretended elaborately not to notice what he was doing. He inserted his fingers and reached for it, and began to toy with it lightly, as a cat does with a ball.

"I just can't get close enough to you," he said and crushed her fiercely in his arms.

"I can't, either."

"Do you remember the circus last year? The clown got out in front of a steam roller and it ran over him and crushed him out so thin that they rolled him up on a stick. That's how I would like to crush you, sweetheart." It was an absurd idea; they laughed with relief.

Guy's mouth grew dry; he felt the constant beat of his pulse in his ears. At last he was able

to say what had been pounding at the edge of his mind.

"I think when a man and woman are meant for each other that it's only a matter between them and God. Other people have been in love with each other before—maybe not so much, but a good deal—and what they did was right. I just know it can't be wrong."

They began to whisper; then their whisperings grew lower and lower; finally they said nothing. The chair squeaked under their weight. They stared into each other's eyes and when one swallowed the other swallowed. They placed their hearts together and listened to see if they beat in unison. She began brushing back his hair; he caught her hand and kissed it passionately. Neither whispered and both breathed heavily.

"I am going to kiss you—as hard as I can," he said.

She quivered under the pressure of his lips.

"I think this is almost holy," Guy heard himself say—he who was such a growing scoffer. When reading he had a curious feeling of triumph that Darwin was right and his father was wrong, but now there was something bigger in life than the monkey theory. He could feel the tears running down his cheeks, mingling with hers.

"It's a little bit of heaven," she whispered.

He kept swallowing, clearing his throat. "Let's pray," he whispered.

"I don't know whether I could or not," she returned, her hot breath stirring rapturously in his ears. "You know how father ——"

"I can. I have always prayed—a little. Kneel here with me and lean your head against the bed."

The two knelt, while he mumbled a prayer.

At last they rose and flung their arms about each other. The prayer, somehow, had seemed to hallow them. Guy sat down on the edge of the enameled bed and drew her into his lap. The springs creaked. Over the foot of the bed, on the chipped scroll work, was a shirt just as he had thrown it when he had left the room. He now managed to drop it between the bed and the wall. He heard the button hit the floor.

"I don't think you know how much I love you," she whispered. "I'll show you—this much!" Taking his face between her hands, she kissed him passionately again and again.

His head was a whirl and an ecstasy seemed almost to lift him from his feet. Never had he known anything in the world so delicious.

"I love you ten million times more, my angel," he whispered, and, reaching up, turned off the light.

For some moments it banged against the rough boards of the wall before it finally settled down.

CHAPTER IX

THE next day Guy went about his small, unending duties in a glorious daze.

As he wrapped up bottles and measured out pills, he went, time after time, over everything that had happened. He repeated the conversation; took it up where it had stopped and carried it on. He could see everything in the shabby little room, with the odor of the drug store hanging over it: the awful picture on the wall, the soiled shirt hanging on the scroll work; could hear the light banging against the rough boards. Going to the ten-cent store, he bought a new shade and savagely crumpled the old one into an unrecognizable mass. During the day he called Bee up, but the conversation was prosaic. There were many "Yeses" and "Did you's" and "So did I's." It was not enough. He wanted to have her in his arms again. He had thought of a million things he must tell her. He even scribbled some of them on a page torn from the yellow ledger. That evening he went to see her, and they looked at each other strangely. They kept consciously far from any reference to the night before. The evening dragged sadly. She did not seem like the same girl. They went out for a walk and at last they started toward the store, but there was a warning pressure on his arm. They walked past the alley, talking of other things.

There was the matter, for Guy, of getting away from the store. The store became a millstone, dragging him down, sometimes almost seeming to crush the life out of him. He hated it with a sudden and unbounded fierceness. If it were not for the store he would have more glorious moments with Bee. Wolf had never seemed so slow and doddering. Never had Wolf loved so passionately. Possibly only a few persons in the world had, Guy assured himself.

He began to read up on deep passions. There were Abélard and Héloïse, a few others; soon they ran out. The world seemed curiously lacking in that respect.

A few evenings later, however, he managed to escape the shackles of the store, and was able, almost as soon as he got to her house, to take Bee into his arms. Again the sweet smell of her breath, the smooth clinging touch of her fingers. They went out walking again, and when they passed the alley he felt no pressure on his arm. They turned down the alley. There were other delicious evenings, other wonderful discoveries. He floated along on the golden days.

One day the telephone rang and he answered it prosaically, with his pencil poised over the order pad. Then his heart bounded—it was Bee's voice:

"Daddy says that if Sunday is a nice day we'll go hay riding, and we want you to come. Oh, darling, do you think of me all the time? I do of you."

A few minutes before he had been dragging behind the counter, fretting at how slowly life moved, when a bell, stuffed with paper, clucked—and now

he was moving on cushions of air. Life was wonderful! How could so many people commit suicide? How could people say life was a dull, monotonous grind? Why did so many people coming to the store and pawing over the cough drops and constipation cures make such an event of a purchase? . . . Already he had intimation that when he enterd the university he would be "rushed" for a fraternity.

"Of course, darling. I think of you all the time—every minute."

Excitedly he made ridiculous diagrams and flowers on the pad and would have said more but for Mr. Wolf, the proprietor, in his greasy skullcap, who came and hovered near.

As Guy moved among his pills he thought of his rather ambitious assurance.

But still, he told himself, he did think of her a lot—more than he had ever thought of anyone else. It was strange how a telephone call could make him tingle so. . . . Some day old Wolf would be telling his people that the Honorable Guy Plummer had once worked in his store. Guy had carved his initials on the slide board which pulled out for the mixing of drugs. Lincoln's initials still showed in the store where he once worked. Stranger things had happened.

Guy knew what the "hay ride" meant. Chew liked to gather persons of Bee's own age around him and go into the country for a holiday. On such occasions Chew hired a hay wagon and with a farmer driving a team of horses jolted down to the thin patch of woods which lined the river east of Junction City, where a picnic lunch was spread under

the trees. There was much laughter and singing. Chew took a delight in such occasions and was the life of the party. It was considered a mark of social distinction to be invited to one of the great lawyer's hay rides. Guy had never gone.

Guy walked on air. It would give him a wonderful day with Bee. He began to think of the things he would say to her. Maybe he could get her away from the crowd and take her into his arms. He began to think of the things he would whisper in her ears. A vision of his father arose. That question must always be met. He would tell his father that he had to go to the store. That was true—but he would not stay. That which he told him would be true, but not the whole truth. He became resentful toward his father. What right had his father to mix in his affairs? he asked himself with growing indignation. Bee was the most wonderful girl in the world—far too good for him. Maybe some day his father would die and then he and Bee could get married. He thrilled at the idea, and then a moment later regretted the unworthy thought. Anyway, when his education was finished they could elope. A dozen vague ideas flashed through his mind. And then soon thoughts of his father were gone. He and Bee commanded the center of the stage.

As Guy moved in the pleasant haze of his thoughts the worn thumb latch on the door clicked; there was a smart *chug*, the compression bumper wheezed—and his father came across the faded blue-tile floor toward him.

"The Kansas City people have just sent me a telegram," he said, with bright eagerness. "I was

coming this way, so I thought I would drop in with it."

As a matter of fact, he had made a hurried, special trip for this very purpose, but even in his moment of elation he must keep from Guy his pleasure in showing it to him. Outwardly Adrian Plummer and his son were merely two chance passengers on the same comet bound to each other only by food and clothing. Between them never passed words even remotely related to affection. And yet ——

Guy's father put his hand in his breast pocket and brought out a frayed-and-worn wallet. The corners were bound in silver; it was the appreciative birthday gift of one of his early country churches. Folded in it was the ostentations yellow envelope.

"I marked the periods in myself."

The telegram said that three members of the church which was considering his pastorship would arrive to hear his Sunday-morning sermon.

"I thought you might be interested, that's all," he said. "I had just about given up hope, but in due time the Lord always finds His own way. Maybe they will have the authority to sign the request for transfer while they are here. Well, it's blowing up from the northwest." At the door he paused, started to call, and then moved back across the worn tile. "They didn't give me much time. Well, I suppose I wouldn't, either—if I wanted to select a good man."

It was as near a jest as Plummer ever permitted himself with his son. His lean, wrinkled face broke into a smile and he combed at his burnsides nervously. Before an audience he was calm and self-

possessed, but before his son there was a secret uneasiness.

The door wheezed and he started down the street on his long, swinging stride; but his eyes were not on the ground. He spoke to everybody and when his feeling was especially cordial he threw up his hand in a crude, uncertain salutation.

He met R. L. Arnhalt shuffling along with one side of his collar turned up.

"Hello there!" greeted Adrian Plummer. "Heard the bad news? Well, you may be able to get shed of me. That Kansas City church is sending up a committee. Then you can have a handsome young preacher. Some of the ladies would like it, eh?"

He put his hand on Arnhalt's shoulder; almost an unheard-of act for Adrian Plummer. "Well, I suppose I'll have to spread myself Sunday. I may give 'em my 'Damnation.'" His eye closed in a huge wink.

Arnhalt offered decent protestations.

"Oh, that's all right, Brother Arnhalt. Nothing like rotation of crops, you know."

Plummer moved off in great good humor.

"I dropped in and showed it to him, Al," he said, as he returned home.

Mrs. Plummer's given name was Alvah and it was only when her husband rose on the wings of elation that he used his humorous abbreviation.

"I guess he was pleased."

"He didn't say much; you know how Guy is—not much of a talker. Of course he wants to go to the city and have a chance with the biggest of them. Why, Ma, he's as bright as a silver dollar. Gracious!

that night he delivered his Lincoln oration he didn't seem like my son at all. I just kept saying to myself, 'Is that the seed of my loins?' He has power, mother, real power—the kind that John Wesley had. If he would only turn from law and politics to the cause of the Lord. What a soldier of the cross he would be! . . . I think he is standing up straighter now than he used to. All I did was just to throw out suggestions. I told him how everybody admired Talmage standing up there in the pulpit—his back as straight as a ramrod. One day when I was in his room at the store I picked up one of his Lincoln books and where it told about the deep, simple, religious beliefs of Abraham Lincoln I drew a line around the passage. That is the best way to handle Guy—subtly. The next day I made it a point to drop in and leave, *The Life and Letters of John Knox*."

Guy's growing friendliness with Chew hung broodingly over Adrian Plummer.

"The other day I saw Chew coming down the steps of his office with his arm in Guy's, talking and laughing and strutting—you know that swagger Chew has. He was telling about the children mocking Elisha and calling him 'bald head' and the two she bears coming out of the wood and tearing up forty and two of the children. 'That's what they are trying to shove down our throats under the name of religion,' he was saying. You know that big, rolling, spread-faced laugh of Chew's. Then the spirit of the Lord came upon me and I stopped and shook hands with Chew and joked with him. 'What's that bear story you are poisoning innocent minds with?' I said. You'll never know how hard it was, Ma.

"I used to feel so hopeless about Guy—as if I was walking around and around a high wall, trying to find a gate and never finding it. But now we talk more; sometimes I almost get my hands on the latch. . . . That night we drove those horrible burlesque actresses from town. Guy was right up at the front, one of the leaders. There was a such a —well, I don't know how you would express it—what you might call a saintly light on his face. Then we walked home together and had such a good talk on the way."

He moved his hands with an abrupt, awkward caress over her face. "This is no way to buy a baby a shirt, is it, Al? Think of being a city lady—maybe giving teas. How do you think you'll like that, Samantha at Saratoga? Do you suppose we'll be as funny as Samantha and Allen?" Then with quick seriousness he added: "But with the armor of the Lord on we shall have nothing to fear. 'At all times His strength beareth me up; it transporteth me to the skies. When the Lord is with you who aught can be against you?'"

Abruptly he began to sing in his roaring, uncertain voice, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

With his shoes clutched in his hands, he disappeared through the door of his "study."

In a few moments he was pacing up and down the floor, shouting out his fiery defiances.

Sunday morning Adrian Plummer rose a full half hour earlier, even, than his accustomed Sunday-morning rising, and with his old-fashioned night-gown reaching a scant halfway to his ankles, went to his "study." Turning in his toes, he balanced

the Bible precariously on his knees—the awkward position in which Guy so often found himself with Bee. Adjusting his glasses over the sacred Word, his finger moved slowly along the lines. When he had finished he went to the bathroom and from the pine shelf in the corner took down his shaving cup with its faded, fanciful scroll, and clinked his worn, lop-sided brush against its chipped sides.

Suddenly the bathroom began to reverberate to "Shall We Gather at the River?"

There was a knock at the door. "Pa, I wouldn't sing quite so loud, if I was you. The neighbors won't know what to think."

"All right, Ma—just as you say. You're the boss."

But it was all he could do to keep from breaking into his cracked, screeching song.

He knocked at Guy's door.

"Shame on such sloth. Do you not know what Ecclesiastes says? 'He shall rise up at the voice of the bird,' and, lo! the birds have been awing these many hours. Hop light, son, hop light. I want you to go down to the depot with me, and you needn't be afraid to look your best."

"We'll walk," he said on the way to the station, "but we'll ride coming back. We can afford to ride more—if we get the city call. I know you'd like the city," he said, with awkward eagerness. "There's a bad board."

It was the remark he always made on finding a loose plank in the sidewalk.

"The city is liable to get sued on account of just such a thing. Do you remember Mrs. Tootle who used to live on our block? The city had to pay

her thirty-two hundred dollars." He unfolded the details.

But his mind was not on this subject.

"I never said much about it, Guy, but are you sure it is law and politics that you want to take up? There is such a big work to be done for the Lord. That is, by a man with new ideas and with a good education. . . . The world moves along so fast. Sometimes I don't believe that the young people of to-day realize the opportunities that— There's another of those loose boards. Wait a minute."

He hammered the board into place with a broken brick.

"It represents the age, Guy," he said, as he slapped his large-knuckled hands together to remove the dust. "It's a careless, pellmell age, leaving everything to somebody else. . . . With the salary I could get in the city I could send you to any theological seminary you wished. It's a great opportunity," he urged.

"I suppose it is," said Guy, finally.

As if talking generally he began to recount the methods of the different evangelists. "Sam P. Jones and Billy Sunday are powerful speakers, but too spectacular. Our Lord Jesus Christ never had to resort to a circus and a merry-go-round. Henry Ward Beecher was a real man of God, deep and sincere." He spoke with assumed lightness: "Why, he was worth a whole pack of jackleg lawyers scoffing at the Word. Talmage was a scholar and a gentleman. Once I traveled more than a hundred miles to hear him. You know, we named you after him—Guy Talmage Plummer." He looked at Guy nar-

rowly. He had said enough. "I'm going to preach a good sermon this morning, Guy. I feel it." His eyes glowed in triumph. It was the day he had long looked forward to. He was now being called to "larger fields." He was Paul of Tarsus coming out of the wilderness to preach to greater numbers of people. The advance in salary, the worldly position, meant little to him—it was a chance to do a larger work for the Lord.

But to Mrs. Plummer the prospect showed in an entirely different way. At last she was to become a "city lady." She was jubilant over it; her dream and ambition were coming true.

The train came panting in; a baseball team noisily descended the steps, banging their bats, gouging one another with thumbs, laughing and calling to one another.

Adrian Plummer moved toward them quickly. "Boys, remember this is the Sabbath. If you must go, go quietly."

The boisterous group quieted.

Three elderly men came down the steps, showing by their better clothes and more polished bearing that they were from the city. Plummer straightened and new life pulsed through him. He welcomed them cordially and yet with dignity. The three men studied him. Adrian Plummer did not have the appearance of a city preacher, but he had "presence" —some indescribable force which won instant respect.

He brought Guy forward. "Gentlemen, I want you to meet my son, Guy Talmage. Maybe some day the Lord will see fit to place my humble mantle

on his shoulders." He was able to say more before the strangers than alone before his son.

Adrian Plummer began to unbend and to be at ease. "Christ saw fit to make His entry into Jerusalem on an ass, but let us make ours a bit more modern. Guy, will you call a jitney?"

They rolled down the vitrified-brick pavement.

Plummer was in his best mood, stirred by a quiet jubilation. Now that the men were actually here, he was not so nervous as he was before they came. He exhibited the town to them with satisfaction; pointed out the water tower from which the city received its supply; showed them the other churches, the new brick garages which had so lately come to town, and then proudly displayed the courthouse. He made it a pleasant drive.

The driver drew up at the curb.

"This is my house," said Plummer. "We will rest here until time to repair to the church."

Mrs. Plummer, in her best black, moved heavily about the sitting room in preparation. When the men were presented, she tried to be at her best. She shook hands after the manner she believed used by city women and spoke with affected politeness.

"Do sit down, gentlemen. Train ridin' always tires a person so. You take this chair, brother. I don't believe I caught your name." The name was announced again. She made a great to-do in getting them properly seated, which in her family was considered good "form." Finally she went lumbering out of the room, to come back a few moments later with a blue-tinted pitcher and three tumblers on a tray.

"Maybe you gentlemen would like to have some lemonade. I always say lemons help clear out the system." She beamed on them, and as they drained their glasses urged them to have more. "Just half a glass. I'll have to throw it out, really I will. Mr. Plummer is never a hand to drink any and I'm not as fond of it as I used to be. But, of course, Guy loves it. I suppose all boys do—young men, I better say." She continued to air the family's likes and dislikes in her most ingratiating effort to be "entertaining."

There was a shuffle of feet on the cement walk and R. L. Arnhalt and Dessie mounted the steps. They had come to walk to church with the Plummers. They were introduced.

"Pleased to meet you, I'm sure," Dessie repeated, mechanically, and sat down with the air of satisfied accomplishment.

They talked of the weather, again of the city, prices, more about the weather, while from time to time Adrian Plummer glanced at his gold watch, snapping the case shut. In a few minutes it would be time to start.

Dessie waited for an opening in the conversation. "Did Guy enjoy the party?" she asked.

"What party, Dessie?" asked Plummer.

"Bee Chew's."

"He didn't go. He told me that he had to be at the store that evening." He looked at his watch again. "Well, gentlemen, I suppose we had better be going. Joshua could command the sun in its heaven to stand still, but we of lesser faith must keep our eye on the clock."

Dessie smiled with the air of possessing a pleasant

secret. "I guess he must have got time off, because I saw him there. He recited 'The Raven' and made a great hit." She went into details of the evening.

Adrian Plummer sat stunned. Was it possible that his son had deceived him? He tried to shake it off.

When they looked around for Guy he was gone. It was decided that he must have gone on ahead.

But to the three visitors from the city Plummer was saying: "The new structure has been up four years. Before that there was a small frame building, but with the help of God we have put up this brick. We have flexible sliding doors so arranged that for Sunday school—" he continued to talk about the church.

It was not until the party turned down Buchanan Street that Adrian Plummer learned the truth about Guy. It was on this street that the Chews lived, and before the house was a hay frame with a party of young people on it, waiting in noisy anticipation of a morning in the country. The heavy farm horses were comfortably fighting flies, and under their throats, in honor of the occasion, the farmer had placed red tassels meant to protect these sensitive spots.

Chew came out of the house with a picnic basket, surrounded by a laughing group of hero worshipers.

Plummer saw Chew, saw the waiting wagon, realized its significance. He trembled. It was another of Chew's attempts to defeat the church. He advanced upon Chew.

"Don't you know what day of the week this is?" he asked.

Chew looked at him in surprise. "I think I do."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," cried Plummer, "trying to keep these young people from going to church."

"So you think taking them into the woods on a beautiful morning where they can get a glimpse of nature is leading them astray, do you?"

Words flew; the two talked at once, but Chew, with his more adroit legal mind, led Plummer in deeper and deeper. Plummer's temper arose and he stepped inside the yard, coming closer and closer to the small attorney. Plummer was shouting, but Chew managed to keep his temper. And then in the heated words Plummer saw Guy on the hay frame; he staggered as though hit by some invisible weapon.

"Guy!" he choked. "You—you!" It was all he could say.

Plummer turned upon Chew, and the impassioned feeling which he had so long borne within him was now loosened:

"So this is the way you strike me. I am not surprised. You are a miserable sinner hanging around the edge of the church, seeking to tear it down, to undermine it with your lies and deceits. I have been watching you. I know your schemes, but I didn't think you would try to lead my own son after you—you godless infidel!"

Mrs. Plummer came fluttering up, one eye on the three men from the city. "Don't say anything more, Adrian. Keep your head. Everything will come out all right." But Plummer was not to be stayed.

"You make fun of my sermons, you belittle my cures, you scoff at the will of God. Not content with

that, you poison the youth of the community by trying to pick flaws in the Bible. Everywhere you go you leave a trail of corruption behind you. You say there is no God, but as sure as I stand here the day is coming when you will fall down before Him. When you come to die you will call on Him." He continued his denunciation.

Plummer stood towering above Chew, and there was about him something majestic, something moving. He was like a prophet of old.

"Get down, Guy," he said at last, thickly, "and come to church."

"Don't you do it, Guy. Stay where you are."

Plummer turned upon the lawyer with sudden fierceness. His long arm shot out and his hand wrapped itself in Chew's collar. Plummer's eyes were ablaze, his breath was coming in gasps, and his lips showed like an animal's. His great temper, which he had fought for so many years, had burst upon him. Then abruptly he paused, let Chew come back to his feet, freed his hands from the attorney's collar. Plummer was whispering under his breath. It was a Bible verse: "I will not cause my anger to fall upon you, for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep my anger."

Abruptly he turned to the astonished men. "We must walk quickly," he said. "We are late."

The three men glanced at one another. He was not the one they wanted for their polite church.

Mrs. Plummer began trying to fix it up. "That man is really awful," she said, indicating Chew. "It would be a good thing if he was run out of town. But Mr. Plummer is the only one that has courage

to face him. Sometimes Mr. Plummer gets a little excited, but it is because he is so earnest. Do you know how many names this church had on the book before he took it over?" she continued.

But Adrian Plummer himself walked along without explanation. He made no excuses. Once he turned to look back. The hay frame was disappearing down the street; Guy was on it. His hands clenched.

They reached the church, and Arnhalt took his place as usher, moving slowly up and down the aisles, speaking in whispers, waving his hands, motioning his head, carrying on a dumb show as he seated the people. There was a stirring of feet and the students from the Sunday school came in; a rattle of papers, much whispering, a few suppressed snorts of laughter, and then the pipe organ began to peal out under the satisfied guidance of Dessie Arnhalt. From time to time she lifted her head slightly, moved her back, reached for her handkerchief, stared up into the mirror.

Adrian Plummer came slowly on the platform, seated himself a moment, and then, getting down on his knees, buried his face in his hands. He remained longer than usual, his toes bent under him; worn metal plates showed on his heels. At last he arose and abruptly spread out his worn Bible on the pulpit. But his preaching had not the feeling which he was usually able to give it; his fire was gone. The words came mechanically. The audience lost interest, people began to squirm, coughing arose. The three men looked at one another and raised their eyebrows. At last they began secretly to consult their watches.

Meantime the hay wagon was jogging slowly into the country. At first Guy kept going over and over the scene. What a fool his father had made of himself, he thought. How much better Mr. Chew had conducted himself. And then the next moment Guy had to admit his father's strength, his power.

The hay wagon had moved off in silence, but after a time they began to talk. Soon the incident began to develop humorous aspects. At last the party had regained its spirits.

Guy now looked at Bee; she was curled up in the hay, a straw hat dangling on the back of her head. How strange and far away she seemed! Was this the person he had held in his arms? who had so passionately kissed his eyes? whose voice over the telephone could make him quiver? the person into whose ears he had whispered such profound thoughts? Was it all a dream? Was this the person he was to grow old with? Why did she seem so aloof? He must touch her. Or should he? If he only dared put his hand on her openly, as Harlan treated girls. He worked his hand under the hay until he was able to touch her. His heart was beating fast, and he felt reassured. She raised her eyes and studied his face soberly. The wagon jolted and rattled and jogged on, but he floated in another world. Something began stirring in him, pushing up in him, carrying him out of himself. What a sensation he could cause if he wished! He could crawl over to Chew, sitting with his feet dangling over the side of the rack, and tell him something that would astonish him. Then he felt ashamed of himself. Why did he have such gross, unworthy thoughts? He wasn't

fit to speak to, let alone touch such a sweet, innocent girl. He did not withdraw his hand.

Mr. Chew with his political interest over the state, his speeches, his banquets, probably thought Guy, shut up in a drug store, led an uninteresting life. Guy smiled. There wasn't a person in Junction City that he would trade places with. Not one.

Turning his hat across his head, Guy gave an imitation of Napoleon. Then to Shakespeare:

"Friends, Romans, countrymen, we have come to bury Cæsar, not to praise him. Lend me your ears. As soon as I am through with them I will return them in good condition."

That was what he liked, showing off his knowledge. When he was Senator maybe people would tell what a cut-up he used to be. Lincoln used to wrestle and box hats. . . . Guy kept them "going."

They reached the river; the horses were taken from their tugs and tied to the wagon to munch hay.

The party wandered through the tangle of brush and in and out among the trees. There were jokes about snakes; toads jumping out frightened the girls; a cow mooed, and there was more laughter. It was a gay party. Soon Guy was one of the gayest. The shadow occasioned by his father had passed away.

They had lunch sitting cross-legged; there were laughing comments about pickles and love; the jelly glass was upset; a finger was cut opening a sardine can.

At last the moment Guy had longed for came. He was able to wander off with Bee alone. He left the others behind. He felt a delicious dizziness. Now she seemed to belong to him. Could he kiss her? he

asked himself. Was it safe to take her into his arms? He felt the same hesitation, the same quick beating of the heart. Why each time was it so hard he asked himself, to put his arm around her? He began by touching her gently, as if helping her over some obstruction. He looked back; no one was in sight; he put his arm around her.

"You've been looking glum all day," he said. "You need somebody to cheer you up. Do you know of such a person?" Bee walked along in silence and Guy sought to rally her again. He began to have a vague, haunting fear. Of course, a girl after such an experience must have moments of regret. He would wipe them away; he would be doubly kind to her, he told himself.

"Gracious, I'm glad to get away from all those people," he said. "You know that old saying about two's company, three's a crowd? Well, it's true, isn't it?"

He rubbed her cheek.

Bee spoke:

"Guy, I think something has happened."

There was no use in asking her to repeat. He had heard perfectly. But he found himself saying, "What did you say?"

Bee repeated the words.

There was a dull, heavy pressure in his ears; the world seemed to reel before him; the ground to waver under his feet. There must be some mistake, he kept telling himself, and yet he knew there was none. A feeling of the hopelessness of life rushed over him.

"It just couldn't be," he exclaimed.

She remained silent.

"You poor girl!" he said, and drew his arm more tightly about her. "I feel so sorry for you." He kissed her. "But I think something can be done. Are you sure?"

She nodded.

"I just can't believe it. It makes me sick all over."

A vision of the consequences rose before him. The law. He had gone to trials in the red-brick court-house when such stories had been dragged through the scandal of a public hearing. He had seen the girl sitting at one table, looking at the floor; and at the other table he had seen the boy trying to evade the stares of the audience.

He felt that he must say something comforting; must reassure her.

"Maybe you made a mistake," he said.

She made no reply.

They could hear the shouts of the merrymakers. They had found a grapevine swing and were trying out its possibilities.

Guy peered into Bee's face. Tears started and he fumbled through his pockets for his handkerchief. "Sweetheart, dear!" he whispered and took her into his arms. "I just know it's going to come out all right. It doesn't stand to reason that such a thing would happen to us." He tried to find words of assurance. How much he wanted to be big and tender! and how little he could say!

Two of the picnickers came up and Guy moved hastily aside; picking up a broken stick, he threw it with a great air of interest among the branches. He began to talk with animation, telling a story of how he and some other boys had once been in swimming

and had found a yellow jackets' nest and how one had stung him. He elaborated on the tale and laughed with great amusement, but the interlopers did not leave. Others came and Guy could not again separate Bee from the crowd.

At last the party jogged home.

When Guy reached his father's house the family was in the kitchen eating a "snack." On Sabbath evenings in the Plummer home a fire must not be built for the preparation of food. It was the time for prayer and meditation. Guy could hear the chairs being drawn into place, the last "hitch." Grace must be said for the cold pick-ups as punctiliously as for the other meals of the week. His father bowed his head, his voice thick and husky from the strain of trying to soften it down. Sometimes it seemed as if he couldn't quite get through the ordeal. . . . "In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, we ask it."

On the bare table Guy could hear his mother cutting more bread. There was the rattle of silver—his father was eating. How many times he had heard it all! How many times he had seen his tall, gaunt, hollow-eyed father with his absurd beard bending over a plate, eating monotonously on, with never a word.

What would his father do? The reckoning must come.

The three men had gone. If the board decided favorably they would communicate with the Rev. Mr. Plummer, so they said.

Guy stole away and went to walk on the streets. Young couples were strolling and chattering deliciously as he passed them; some moved swiftly by in

cars; some in buggies with rubber tires. Now and then a peal of laughter. Lovers everywhere. Other people seemed to be so gay and happy, while his heart was heavy. He rebelled. It wasn't right that he should be in all this trouble and these other people so happy and care free. He was just as good as they were. Life wasn't fair. Why should it pick on him? He gripped his hands and clenched his jaws. He would do something—something big.

At last hope began to rise. Maybe, after all, matters weren't so bad as he had thought. She might be wrong. It could be. She was probably frightened and everything would turn out right. Other times things had looked bad for him, and there seemed to be no way out, and then just by waiting they had solved themselves. Maybe it would be so now. The more he thought of this the surer he became that everything would be all right. He wouldn't do anything just yet. It was a great relief. He began to whistle.

Going into the Greek candy kitchen, he climbed up on one of the wire stools. "Hello, Nick, old boy!" he said, lightly. "Shoot me a soda."

It tasted good.

CHAPTER X

WHEN Guy awoke the next morning there was a dull pounding in his head. He had a confused sense of being in an unordered world; regrets, fierce resolves, and bitter defiances floated through his mind. The unfairness of life came to him.

How he hated, the night before, to come home! He had thought of going to the Commercial House, of running away. But there was the matter of money, the future which looked so bright and promising. He could not cut away from his father. . . . At last he had come wearily home and climbed the creaking stairs.

The stair door opened. "Guy! Guy! You hear me?"

Guy propped himself up in bed and dangled one leg over the side. How small and mean and cheap the room now seemed; never before had it given him this feeling, but now he wanted to get away from it—anywhere. He began to hunt for his socks, and as he found them scattered about the floor he resolved that to-night he would hang them in orderly array on the foot of the bed.

He shook out his trousers and got into them. Under the percale curtains was his graduation suit. How happy he had been that night, he thought; and now how things had changed. As he looked back on events he could not fix in his mind that

which had been responsible. How, bit by bit, life crept on one; the changes were so small from day to day that one suspected nothing until calamity struck. He found the flower which Bee had pinned in his lapel. Some of the leaves fell apart.

"That's just the way with her heart," he whispered. "I have lost some of it." It was romantic and he liked the feeling. "Yes," he whispered, in fierce denunciation of himself, "I have taken the most precious thing in the world and broken it, torn its very heart out." He continued to goad himself.

The stair door opened.

"Yes, I'm coming," he called, thickly. It irritated him, but he lingered, dreaded the meeting with his father. "I'm not going to take anything off him," he said.

At last he was ready to go down.

The hay for Prince had grown dusty; the new crop was not in. To handle the dusty hay made Adrian Plummer cough, and recently it had become Guy's duty, of a morning, to go up in the mow and throw down enough to run Prince through the day. His father, always so anxious to start the day, wished to have it done before breakfast. Guy now paused to look out the window of his room. He could see his father moving about the barn in his shirt sleeves; his coat was hung on the harness arm, and his sleeves were held in place by the flowered holders. Why couldn't he have an up-to-date father? "Yes, one who has some sense," he said fiercely to himself. "He can throw down the hay this morning himself."

"*Rap-rap-rap!*" the currycomb went against the stall. But his father was not singing. There was

only the rattle of the comb and the sound of Prince gnawing his corn in the trough.

Guy lingered, looked at himself in the mirror, turned the laces in his shoes so that all would lie flat and straight, went in and looked at the peacock fan. He saw his father come to the door of the barn, look toward the house, then start to climb the ladder to the mow, dragging the fork behind him. In a moment a cloud of dust flew out. He heard his father cough.

"Let him," he said. "I don't care."

Guy entered the kitchen. The yellow blaze with blue tip was glowing behind the isinglass, and as his mother moved over the worn linoleum the windows jarred slightly.

"I'll put on a clean towel," she said.

She bent over the skillets. "Your pa is awfully upset this morning," she said in a voice of strained anxiety. "He didn't get his rest last night. Don't go ag'in' your father. *Sssh!*—here he comes."

She liked to feel that she was having some secret with Guy which his father did not share. Sometimes at the table she looked across at Guy knowingly; tried to exchange glances with him.

"I've set the things on," she announced.

Breakfast was eaten in silence; at last Mrs. Plummer began to scrape the dishes into one and swish water around in the cups.

"Come into the 'study,'" said Plummer. "We're going to have a little talk." Plummer's voice was low and constrained. "There is one thing I cannot stand, Guy, and that is deceit. You know what I mean. You gave me to understand that you would

have nothing more to do with that girl." Guy felt the bitterness of the accent on "that girl." "And now I find that you have been seeing her right along. You went to the party she gave. You told me that you had to go to the store. And then yesterday morning." The bitterness of that scene welled up in Plummer. "I made a fool of myself. I won't get the call now, but that doesn't matter. There are worse things. I don't often give positive commands and I give this one only after consideration—you must have nothing more to do with Chew or his daughter."

Guy felt a quickening within him; the call of strife. He must speak out and tell him that he would never give her up—never, never, never. He would be her champion, fly to her defense. He thought of many heroic things, but with the earnest, sincere figure of his father before him such words did not come easily.

"I'll see her if I want to," he said at last, "both of them. I'll see them any time I want to." He continued. He would come right back at his father, he told himself. He was almost a man—almost twenty-one. He wouldn't put up with any more of his father's old-fashioned ideas.

"Guy, I'm afraid you don't understand me. I say that you will have nothing more to do with them."

"I say that I will."

Words flew. Guy heard himself saying hot, bitter things. They arose and stood facing each other, both talking at once. And then Guy saw a sudden fierceness rise in his father, a deep righteous indig-

nation which gave him strength beyond his own. Guy had seen it a few times when his father had swept all aside. Once two drunken men had come to a country schoolhouse where his father was preaching and tried to break up the meeting. His father had asked them to be quiet, but they had continued. Then abruptly his father had walked down the aisle and seizing one of the men had carried him to the door and flung him out; then the other. Returning to his Bible spread out on the teacher's pine table, he had calmly continued his sermon.

"You will do as I say."

Mrs. Plummer came waddling in. "Pa, Pa, don't get excited! You didn't mean to do anything wrong, did you, Guy boy?" She was half crying, half moaning, and wiped her eyes with her apron.

"I'm not going to give her up," Guy heard himself saying. "I—I like her." Even in this distressed moment he could not bring himself to say "love." The word was never used in the Plummer household except in a humorous manner, and now Guy could not speak it.

Mrs. Plummer threw her arms around Plummer and began to sniffle. Her heavy bosom was pushed out of place. "Pa, you quiet yourself."

At last Plummer was able to check himself. His hand trembled, the fierce, wrapped look slipped from his face.

"Guy!" he cried "With an infidel's daughter! No, no, it cannot be!" His lips moved without speaking. It was some moments before he could calm himself. "You are my son, Guy," he said at last, while Mrs. Plummer was blowing her nose,

"and as long as you stay under my roof you will follow my wishes. I tell you you shall have nothing more to do with either of them. I forbid you to see them. I know this sounds harsh, but the day will come when you will thank me. You will see the falseness of their beliefs. Nothing in this world matters but the true God and they have none." He continued to present his side of the case.

Guy listened in silence. What should he do? he kept asking himself. "I'll run away," he repeated to himself. "I'll never let him see me again. I'll marry Bee. I'll do anything I wish. He's nothing to me, the old fogy." And then the full situation came to him. What if Bee should not want to run away? What would her father say? What would the people say? Too well Guy knew the power and hate of a small town, where life is so concentrated. The sorry muddle whirled before him. And then he began to think what his father would say if he knew all. The world seemed to close about him. How little did one have to do with life, he thought. It was some great, dark waterspout which whirled one about, tossed him and played with him, and then after a time dropped him, a worn-out and beaten old man.

"Give me a few days to think it over," Guy heard himself saying at last.

He was surprised at himself saying this, when a few moments before he had hated his father so fiercely. What queer changes a person goes through, he thought, what reversals . . . what unexpected sidings one finds himself on in one's progress through life.

His father seized his hand. "That is all I want you to do, Guy—just think it over." Tenderness was in his voice. "You don't know how happy that makes me. That is what the whole world needs—to think it over. To reason with one another. The great Redeemer Himself taught it." He began to grow light-hearted. "Now you run on to your work and we'll be good friends, won't we?"

"Yes," Guy answered, thickly.

Adrian Plummer hovered over Guy, his hands reached out to touch him. but never quite came in contact with him.

The worried look lifted from Mrs. Plummer's face; her lips no longer uttered half-articulate sounds.

"You better take your umbrella, Guy," she said. "It looks like rain."

Guy went down the street feeling as if something calamitous had been averted. Things would come out all right, he told himself. He began to feel quiet hopeful. He stopped in at Cod's and lighted a cigar.

"How's the old sport this morning?" asked Cod.

"Fine and dandy," answered Guy.

He continued down the street, leaving a trail of blue cigar smoke.

That afternoon he received a telephone call from Bee.

"I want to see you," she said. "Come at once, please!"

His heart began to pound. He could not tell whether it was good news or bad. But soon he began to think that it was something favorable.

Again there was the question of getting away from

the store. The millstone hung more heavily than ever around his neck. "I'm just a galley slave," he said, and thought of all the pictures he had seen of the victims tied to their oars on Egyptian war vessels. If it were not for the store he told himself, he could do something.

That afternoon, however, he was sent on a bicycle to deliver a package. On the way back he turned down Buchanan Street and whirled up the shady drive with fast-beating heart. Bee received him in the drawing-room where he had first held her in his arms. She smiled, and his heart began to bound—after all, he told himself, it was only a horrible nightmare. His spirit seemed to soar among the clouds.

They shook hands perfunctorily, and when she sat down it was across the room from him. They tried to talk, but there seemed to be nothing to say. Once there had been so much; the words had come pouring out, tumbling, rushing.

"I tore down to see you just as fast as I could. You know I always want to see you."

Bee said nothing.

"Old man Hardesty is in this morning tanking up again. Some people just seem to be born weak in the bean."

"That's the man we saw that—that night?"

"Yes, same old funnel. You've got on that dress I like, haven't you? You always think of little things, don't you? Oh, by the way, Bee, I got a trade last for you!" He looked at her beamingly. "Mr. Mills was in the store yesterday and he said you were the prettiest girl that had ever been in the high

school. Well, I didn't knock him down." Guy laughed awkwardly. Mr. Mills was the principal of the high school. "And he said it wasn't just skin deep, either."

Bee covered her eyes with her hands.

Guy must say something. "Isn't everything all right?"

"I'm not mistaken now."

Even in this moment there was a thrill about it. He had held this pretty girl in his arms; had kissed her eyes; had kissed her neck, her ears. Oh, the adventure of it! He knew that he ought to feel ashamed of himself. She was in trouble; he had caused it; he alone was responsible; he had changed the course of her life—and he was finding it thrilling.

"I'm a damn fool," he said, fiercely, to himself. "I ought to be kicked out of town."

She was too good for him; he was not worthy to kiss the hem of her garment. Many times he had heard his father use the phrase. Now it meant something. What a sweet, noble girl she was! There wasn't another like her in the world. And he was like old man Hardesty. Only old man Hardesty was better. He had never ruined a girl.

The thrill of a few moments ago was gone and in its place was a heavy, numb feeling. The awful thing that had happened didn't seem real.

He cleared his throat. "Dearest, I love you just the same."

She looked at him queerly; then her hands went back to her face.

Her heart was breaking; she was being tortured;

her soul was being wracked. He must do something; something big. He sat down beside her.

He put his arm around her and tried to draw her hands from her face. He could feel the wet slippiness of her tears. She remained inert in his arms—she who had once embraced him so passionately.

"It's not right," he rebelled. "And we knelt down and prayed. I never felt holier in my life. I never felt more stirred up and closer to God. It wasn't wrong. I know it wasn't. Nobody could make me believe that in a million years. It makes a person lose all faith in everything. I don't believe there is a God," he said, fiercely. "Look at all the people who steal and rob and carry on—and nothing ever happens to them. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. So why should we be made to suffer? Just because we happened to love each other deeply and sincerely we got to bear all this. I won't stand it—I won't. Not much. I am a fighter."

He strode up and down the room defiantly.

"Of course we could get married—only," he swallowed heavily—"only I wanted to go to the university and—well, get a start. I have been getting ready all my life for that. I suppose if we got married quick off it would be all right. Lots of times babies ——" He could not finish; even before her he could not use the words. "Such things do happen. You're always hearing of them. Nobody would ever know. I could read law with your father. You know he thinks I am some punkins. Don't cry; please don't. It just pretty near kills me. It would take me longer, but I could do it. When a person makes uo their mind to do a thing nothing

can stop them. I believe that more than anything else. Why, look at the big people who have come into the world illegitimate—statesmen, orators, big men. Look at Alexander Hamilton. Look at ——" He began to hunt for names. "Where could you get a bigger man than him? Why, they say children born this way lots of times are smarter than—well, than the ones that come the other way. And we do love each other don't we?"

Impulsively she flung her arms around him.

He soothed her confidently—a big man bringing comfort to a small child.

"Come now, little girl. We can get out of this all right. I suppose thousands of people have been in this fix before. We know we love each other. What else is there to worry about? We can get the doctor to say that you were bounced in a buggy or something. I knew a thing to happen that way once."

It was surprising that he could be talking to her this way. A few weeks before he would have bitten his tongue off. . . .

"Do you think it would be taking life?" she whispered.

"What do you mean, dearest?"

"Do you suppose if it could be stopped—it would be—well, taking human life? That is what I have been thinking—ever since I found out, but I couldn't tell you. Sometimes girls go away and have it stopped. I have an Aunt Grace in Kansas City ——"

He began to walk the floor, to expand.

"If you could do that, then I could go to the university, and as soon as I got through ——" He squeezed her hand.

"But it would take money and papa mustn't know."

"How much?"

"I expect it would take five hundred dollars."

Five hundred dollars! A fortune! Guy's father once received little more than that as a year's salary.

Guy bit his nails as he did when troubled, gnawing them feverishly.

"Little piggie-wiggie want something to eat?" It was the phrase she used in trying to break him of the habit.

"I have two hundred dollars. You take that. I don't have to go to school this year, anyway." Law is one of those things that takes a fully-matured mind, he reflected. Besides, he could be "reading" with her father.

"Papa will buy my railroad ticket, but I couldn't ask him for more than a little bit every week."

Guy leaped to his feet. "I'll get it for you. I've got quite a bit more than two hundred."

As a matter of fact he had only ten or twelve dollars more, but he would get it; just leave that to him. He stood before her impressively.

"How could you get it?"

"I'll get it, all right. I'll borrow it. I've got lots of friends—scads of them. You don't know what a load this has lifted off my mind."

She looked at him steadily.

When he left they embraced rapturously.

"I don't want to go," he whispered, ardently. "I want to stay and talk with you forever. We belong to each other now."

When he looked back she was standing in the window. He waved at her. He felt almost married.

"She's a sweet, lovely girl," he said, aloud. "I'm not half good enough for her. Now I've got to borrow that money."

But it would not be so easy as he had pretended. How many people in town were there from whom he could borrow money? The explanations. The consultations with his father! He went out determined to get the money. R. L. Arhnalt was his first prospect. He climbed the dirty wooden steps which led to Arnhalt's real-estate-and-abstract office. On the riseboard of every other step was nailed a splotched yellow tin strip with his unending catch line:

"Ask Mr. Arnhalt—he knows."

Entering the bare, gloomy office with worn linoleum on the floor, Guy sat down nervously on one of the stiff upright chairs to wait till Arnhalt would come shuffling out of his "private" office. On the wall was a deer's head, badly mounted; one frayed ear was sagged and lopped. On the wall was a framed panel in which Arnhalt was shown laying the corner stone in a distant city for the Woodmen of the World—another of his proud trophies taken when he was one of the state organizers. Under his own picture he had made a cross, that the eye need do no unnecessary wandering. Beside it on the wall was a wire-picture rack filled with post-card pictures of houses and lots he had sold.

Guy picked up a copy of a "booster" folder. It was a highly colored pamphlet entitled "Junction City—a Comer," prepared by the Commercial Club

and used by Arnhalt to impress prospective purchasers. Among the prominent business men—"some of our hustlers"—was a picture of Arnhalt, taken fifteen years before, in a high standing collar. (Two pages back his paid advertisement appeared.) Junction City was rich; it was beautifully situated in the midst of fertile farming lands; it raised wonderful pure-blood live stock—unexcelled Poland China hogs, pedigreed Herefords; its cribs were filled with yellow corn; its granaries were overflowing with golden wheat, rye, oats, and small grain. In the summer could be heard the sharp click of the mowing machines as the farmers laid low their long-stemmed and abundant timothy, while over the waving wheat fields the happy tillers of the soil moved to the music of the deep-throated binders.

As Guy read on he felt better. With all this great wealth about him there should be no difficulty in borrowing three hundred dollars.

"Oh, it's you, Guy!" said Arnhalt. "Looks like it was going to blow up a little." He took his glasses off and let them snap up on their self-winding chain. "Well, how are you, anyway? Always glad to see you." He talked uselessly while he tried to think what mission had brought his caller. "Your father all right and everybody?"

Guy was able to get it out at last:

"Mr. Arnhalt. I want to borrow some money."

So that was what brought him. Arnhalt unhooked his glasses from their holder and fitted them on his thin and slightly humped nose. Guy had come at the most unfortunate time; things weren't moving

the way they had been; in fact, were awfully tight. But how much did he want? Three hundred! That was a great deal of money. A very great deal. He had started his business on two hundred. What did he want it for?

Guy hesitated. It was a personal matter. Immediately Arnhalt edged forward in his chair. He was on the quest—he who had collected rents, who had turned families out of their homes, who had risen through small, petty meannesses until he was one of the rich men of the town. Yes, he would have to know what it was for. He always made that a point in all business dealings.

Guy started to leave. Arnhalt shuffled to the door behind him. "Don't think I am being close or anything, Guy. It's pure business—just trying to protect myself." He continued his mumblings.

Guy went away dispirited.

When he went over the list of people he knew there was none he could get it from; he had no "scads" of friends. He could not get it from the bank; there would be notes to sign; questions; his father would know.

Time passed rapidly. Every day was bringing Bee closer to her trouble and Guy's career was being threatened by the lack of a few dollars! He was distracted and could hardly work.

One day the telephone rang. "It's for you," said Mr. Wolf, "some lady."

Guy pretended to be looking for his pencil and arranging the pad while old Wolf looked at him out of the corner of his eye. Guy's heart was beating heavily. Maybe this was good news. Something

was bound to happen; there must be a way to stop it. Closing his eyes, he walked along the narrow littered space back of the counter, guiding himself with his hand, praying.

"O God, make everything come out all right!" he said, feverishly. "Thou hast great power, and great will be Thy glory. In Heaven's name, save us, for Christ's sake." It was an absurd prayer.

"Hello!" he said, as matter of fact as he could.

"Guy, is that you?" he heard a faint voice saying. "I just think of you all the time. Oh, Guy, everything is coming out all right!"

"Is that so?" he cried. "I knew it would."

"Thank Thee, O God," he whispered, in an ecstasy of relief. How glad he was that he had prayed. There was a God.

"I mean about going to visit Aunt Grace. I am fixing my clothes now. Is—is that—what you spoke about all right?"

The telephone seemed to recede from him; the world to go whirling off into an impossible scramble.

"I—I haven't got it yet. That is, not just yet. But I think I will soon. Such things are a bit slow, you know—sometimes. But you go right ahead. I know everything will turn out all right."

"Did the lady say anything in particular?" asked Wolf, when finally Guy turned away.

"No, nothing in particular. Just wanted to talk." He turned to the shelves of prepared medicines. "I'll go ahead rearranging the 'patents.' They're so jumbled up I never can find anything without breaking my neck climbing around."

"Dass iss goot," said Wolf.

Mounting the stepladder, Guy began to whistle lightly.

It was the following evening that he broke in and robbed the office of Ed. Hoecker, the commission merchant.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN his place was robbed, Ed Hoecker was out with the new milliner having a "good time." His question-mark tie pin never glowed more resplendently.

The robbery had been effected easily. Hoecker's Cash Commission House faced on State Street, but extended back to an alley. To enter the rear of this low, gloomy building, with its corrugated-window shutters, one had but to come quietly up the alley-way, insert a wedge, and put on pressure. Guy had little difficulty.

Guy paused among the packing cases, butter casks, and chicken coops. In some of the coops were live chickens that had not yet gone off to meet their fate.

A squalid room was partitioned off from the coops and boxes by gunny sacks rudely nailed up. Here the candlers sat on their high stools, legs sprawled out, rattling the eggs in the slots of their shaded boxes. Gathering up one of the candles, Guy moved toward the rude cash till, operated underneath by catches and stops. These in his work Hoecker fingered. He would give the till a pull and then hand a farmer his money with never a look at him. Ed was from the city, and some day—holy codfish, make it soon!—would be back where there was something doing. Meantime, he would make the best of what picking there was.

The blinds in the dark, evil-smelling store were drawn, but Guy took no chance. Turning an empty soap box on end, he placed the candle in its hooded protection and applied his chisel. He gathered up the bills, scooped the silver from the round depressions, then stole quietly out.

The alley led out to Juniper Street, and up the littered way Guy started. He turned into Juniper Street and breathed a sigh of relief—glad to get away from the gloomy place. A figure was coming toward him; he looked back to see which way to go, but it was only R. L. Arnhalt slouching home, one shoulder higher than the other, his eyes on the pavement.

Arnhalt grunted a greeting. "Ought to have some decent lights. Goodness knows we pay enough." He shuffled off into the darkness. Anything Arnhalt talked about soon got back to money.

Guy turned down Mulberry Street to his father's house. The square wooden structure showed palely. Across the front was a large inviting porch with white wooden posts; there was fancy scrollwork at the top, and iron pegs were at the bottom to keep the posts from rotting. The structure was as large, severe, and uncompromising as Adrian Plummer himself. There was not a flower in the yard, but all was neat and carefully in repair. Plummer himself, in his old jumpers, had painted the house. Then with the paint still in the hair of his hands he had gone to his pulpit. He liked to "fuss around" with paint.

Guy took off his shoes and, opening the unlatched door, crept up the stairs to his room. Ordinarily

he thought nothing of making a noise, but now he set his shoes down one at a time. Drawing down the window shades, he turned on the light. There was two hundred and twenty dollars and some silver. He placed it in a shirt his mother had starched for him and, piling others on top of it, closed the drawer. He took his nightshirt from its hook. That morning a button had come off, but already his mother had discovered it and sewed it on. He felt a sudden tenderness for her. Sometimes he hated his mother, compared her with the wonderful Bee, looked on her as being an affliction; but now he felt a warm place in his heart for her.

"She's twice as good a mother as I deserve," he whispered.

He tumbled into bed, and then remembered his socks. He groped around on the floor for them, but at last had to turn on the light. He hung them on the back of a chair and again went to bed feeling proud of himself. He had heard how people, after committing a crime, tossed on a weary bed with wild and disordered thoughts, but not so with him. His eyes soon closed and he slept unusually well.

The next morning he went prosaically to work.

"It seems strange how life just keeps on whatever happens," he said to himself, as he put on his white coat.

Again was the matter of getting away from the drug store. The store seemed to become, more than ever, a millstone, dragging him down, choking the life out of him; but at last he was able to slip away and hastened to Bee's house. She was alone, except for the cook. Here, since the death of her mother,

she had lived with her father. Here he had read to her, discussed life—the eternal mystery—with her, and here he had planted the seeds of his ideas. While Adrian Plummer was leading Guy along the path he considered the only and true one, Chew had interpreted for Bee life as he saw it—sewed his seeds—just as the pioneers coming to Missouri, Iowa, and Nebraska had planted their osage hedges. But the hedges had grown with such alarming swiftness that they were beyond control. The sons of the pioneers were now chopping them down.

Guy threw his arm around Bee. "You're on my mind all the time," he said. "I just yearn to be with you every minute. I've got the money," he continued and put the roll of bills, held with a rubber band, into her hand. "It's some I saved up."

She kissed him silently.

They whispered together, clinging to each other; she had never seemed so precious.

"I don't care if I never get to go to college," said Guy to himself in his ecstasy. He could hardly force himself to leave her—but there was the store, the millstone. At last he tore himself away and went swinging up the street, from time to time whistling lightly.

Soon there was a telephone call.

"I've just had papa on the wire and he says that I can take the four-twenty," said Bee. "Do you want to go to the station with me?"

How rapidly things moved! he thought.

"Of course," he said.

There was the gamut of his father; he might be seen; again the matter of getting away from the

millstone. He would have to work long hours overtime. But the great joy that everything was coming out happily more than offset his troubles. He shaved in the little back room. Even to shave was an adventure—it seemed to be taking him so completely into the world of grown men. He had never let anybody see him shave; it was something not meant for the eyes of the world. He ran his hand down his cheek; it was almost as smooth and as velvety as Bee's. The feel of the brush, the odor of the soap, made him think of her. He wanted to touch Bee again, rub her cheek, take her into his arms. He began to whisper to her, to say over and over a farewell message.

He anxiously waited the hour, but was hardly prepared for Chew to draw up in front of the store in his car. Ed, the driver, blew the horn. Guy came out uneasily; a quick glance down the street assured him that his father was not in sight.

Guy thought Bee had never looked more beautiful than now, with the bags and boxes piled around her.

"She has a holy look," thought Guy, "the kind that nuns wear."

He had never seen a nun, but in his ecstasy the two expressions seemed similar. "How I love her," he whispered to himself, "every inch of her!"

They glided down the vitrified pavement.

"You know how women folks are," said Chew, with the gay banter that was his. "When they make up their minds they want a thing, they want it right now and no back talk. Nothing would do her but she must grab the first one out. You're a queer lot, aren't you, Beezie?" He pinched her playfully.

The train came rumbling in, making the little wooden depot, with its sanded sides, reverberate. The agent, with black sleeve protectors, leaned out the window and waved humorously at the engineer. A baggage clerk on the train made as if to pitch out a box on one of the station helpers. A loafer who had been whittling put his knife away. . . . Life was moving along.

Guy looked at Bee standing so quietly in the crowd, an attempt at a smile on her face. Should he kiss her? he asked himself. People did—when they went away on the train. Yes, he must kiss her. Wouldn't she be better off if she had never seen him—if she had never even heard of him? Of course she would, much better. He had brought her only trouble. He breathed deep. But he would get her out of it. He would protect his little girl. He was a fighter. He would place her at the top. People would honor her. The day would come when people would be mighty glad to get a smile from her. He would make it up to her. Yes and a thousand times more. . . . He felt better.

"Don't feel bad, little girl," he whispered. "Everything's going to come out all right. You know our poem about the harder you are knocked down the higher you bounce." He squeezed her hand. "Well, I am some bouncer. If the money I gave you isn't enough, let me know and I will send you more."

A bevy of girls came fluttering up: "Oh, look who's here! Bee Chew! Are you going somewhere? Why didn't you let us know—so we could have given you a going-away party? Everybody is. Your suit, it's perfectly stunning."

Bee was sorry. She had made up her mind overnight, practically in an hour.

It was some time before they could be evaded.

The porters put down their wooden steps and the crowd moved toward the train.

Mr. Chew kissed Bee good-by. Guy looked at him, shocked. Never would *he* kiss her so calmly, his hat on his head, his hands drooping at his sides. He would always kiss her pass——. Mr. Chew moved away expectantly. What should Guy do with all those girls looking on?

He followed Bee up the steps and down the aisle behind her, banging her suit case.

"I guess this 'll be all right," he said as he found a seat for her. He felt himself trembling. "I'll put it up here," he said, placing the suit case on a rack. "I guess it 'll stay all right, but be careful. Once I saw one bounce off and hit a man on the head—a little withered-up-looking fellow. It sure gave him a lick. I don't know whether he ever sued the road or not. He ought to, anyway."

What was all this he was spurting? He hadn't meant to do anything like that. He had intended to whisper in her ear something worth while—something she could think about as the train was running along; maybe in the hospital.

What a fool he was! Never in his life had he seen a suit case bounce off and hit a man on the head. It had come over him like a flash and he had made up every word of it. Even described the man. . . . He wasn't good enough for her to mop her feet on.

The sharp insistence of the bell began. The passengers were looking at him curiously.

"Good-by, Miss Chew," he said, and extended his hand.

"Good-by."

"Good-by," he mumbled again.

"All aboard!"

He felt the train start.

He went lunging down the aisle. He hadn't kissed her; he hadn't even lifted his hat. He was a hundred times worse than her father. Why was he always doing the wrong thing? Wouldn't he ever have any sense?

And the absurd idea of calling her Miss.

In a moment he was thinking: "Here I am making a bigger fuss and kicking myself more about this than I did in stealing all that money."

Stealing was a serious thing—very serious. Much more serious than a kiss—especially when each understood the other the way he and Bee did. A kiss wasn't anything, anyway. Darwin said that it was the remnant of a hunger feeling.

Guy waited at the end of the platform by the dripping water tank for Mr. Chew to go, but when he came back Mr. Chew was still there.

"Jump in," Mr. Chew called as he pushed open the door. "Great little girl. It's sure going to make the house empty—for awhile."

They glided over the vitrified bricks.

The egg candlers, letting themselves in that morning by the accustomed front door, had not noticed anything amiss until they went into their room, darkened with its wall of gunny sacking. One of the men, ripping a match down his trousers' leg, bent over to light the candle in his shadow box.

"Who the Sam Patch has been monkeying around here? I wish they'd keep out, the dingbusted fools."

Hod, the head candler, let him know that he wasn't one of the specified fools; he hadn't touched anything; he had enough to do with his own box, let alone fooling with anybody else's.

The candle, twisted and lopsided, was found in the soap box. Then the hubbub began.

In a moment Hod was flying down the street to the hotel where Hoecker was sleeping after his late hours of the night before. Stretching and yawning of a morning, Hoecker would stare fascinated at himself in the mirror, twisting his face around, lifting his brows, looking back over his shoulder in pleased satisfaction as he donned different articles of apparel. Finally adjusting his diamond pin, he would go down to the dining room, elaborately wipe out the plate with his napkin, and then turn to the overworked waitress.

"Good morning, Mary Sunshine. How's the kiddo this A.M.? Come here, sis. Listen. You ought to been out with us last night. If you want to stick around here slinging hash and never having any fun, don't blame your uncle Dudley. We drove clear to Gaynor City. How's the cakes this morning—good for shoe soles?"

Hod pounded at the door. "Mr. Hoecker, something's happened. You been robbed. They broke in the back door."

Hoecker, hastily arrayed, but his diamond pin riding safely, hurried to the store and examined the till.

Taking up the telephone at his littered desk, he

humped over it. Harry Tootle, the town marshal, answered.

"Harry," he whispered, "this is Ed. Hoecker. I wish you'd come—quick. Bad job pulled off here last night and I want you to get on the trail while it's warm."

Marshal Tootle sauntered in with an effort at casualness and made an examination. "How much do you think you had in it, Ed?"

"Close up to two hundred and sixty dollars. I think that's about it."

As a matter of fact the amount was two hundred and twenty-odd dollars, including the silver.

Soon the news spread up and down the street and a stream of people was trickling in to see the bold work of the robbers. More came. They ran in from other stores; from across the street; from the other side of the Square. They had much business with Hoecker that morning.

"Did you hear about the robbery at Ed Hoecker's? Somebody sneaked through the back door and cleaned out the place. No, not the slightest idea, but whoever it was they were experienced hands. Well, I've been saying it was about time for this town to have something like this happen to it. It comes in cycles."

The cycle theory was threshed out.

Again:

"Did you hear about them breaking into the Commission House last night? Harry Tootle's working on it now. If you want to, you can go by and just sort of happen to drop in. Don't say a word. They want to keep it quiet, you know."

The rural mail carriers stopped to get the latest word; farmers coming in with their produce listened eagerly to the dramatic news, and then, getting out, stumped to the rear door and studied the imprints of the wedge . . . Ed Hoecker was busy calling "headquarters" on the long distance.

Whoever it was must be made to pay. That was the only way to crush out crime. Give them an inch and they would take a mile. And then the people began to recall other bold robberies.

The soap box with the candle, lopsided and still in place, was exhibited on Hoecker's desk. Whoever it was didn't know enough to have a flashlight. That was one thing certain. They must not have been very experienced thieves.

. . . Yes, they were. You could tell that by the way they got in. The candle was probably a blind. Slick thieves did such things. They went around in bands.

R. L. Arnhalt came in. Releasing his glasses from their spring he adjusted them on his thin nose. "I just heard about it, Ed, and I thought I'd run in to see if I could do anything. I don't suppose there is very much just at present, but if there is you let me know. In a case like this everybody ought to get behind a man and give him their support. How much did you say you lost, Ed?"

"Three hundred dollars," some one called.

"About that," said Hoecker.

"That's quite a bit of money," returned Arnhalt, eagerly, "especially to lose."

"A couple of days' business." Hoecker moved

with a swagger. "I suppose I'll have to make it up out of my own pocket." He jingled his coins.

"That's sure hard luck. How'd you say they got in, Ed?"

The story was repeated.

"Something ought to be done about it," said Arnhalt, and then shuffled away contentedly.

That afternoon the *Banner* came out with a spread headline:

STARTLING ROBBERY

BOLD THIEVES ENTER THROUGH REAR DOOR OF COMMISSION HOUSE.

All Citizens Warned to Exercise Unusual Care of Property.

The evening Bee had taken the train Guy walked home from the store with a light head. The tide of hope was coming in. Things would come out all right. "You can't keep a good man down," he repeated. "The harder you are knocked down the higher you bounce." The way to conquer life was to keep right after it—to hit the line hard. Most people gave up too easily. Look at the way Napoleon, after his exile, had come back to Cannes and raised an army in a week. . . . He began to feel better.

Maybe, after all, he hadn't been such a fool at the train as he had thought. Things had been hurried and confused. If he had kissed her, the girls would have seen him through the window. And under the circumstances it was best to call her "Miss"—with all those people listening to every word, and especially

when both understood how it was. In fact, he had done a lot better than some people would. Some day he and Bee would laugh at it.

"Say, Bee, do you remember when you were going away on the train and I called you 'Miss?'"

He laughed in imitation and snapped his fingers. When you come to think about it it was funny. "You poor little puss, you just put your shoulder here and rest. You look all tired out this evening." He lifted his shoulder to receive an imaginary head and almost could he feel her soft, wavy hair. The old curious quickening and exaltations that rose in him when he thought of caressing her, now came over him. He began to whistle. After all, it was a pretty good old world.

"Your father wants to see you," said Mrs. Plummer, as Guy came up on the porch that evening.

Adrian Plummer was in the back yard, washing up the gift buggy in which he made his calls. He had on the old suit of clothes he kept hanging in the barn. Other men, for such occasions, had workmen's overalls and jumpers, but Adrian Plummer continued the habit of a lifetime. He had jacked a rear wheel up on a board which he himself had notched. Others used a lever jack, but this was too new, too modern for Adrian Plummer. His hands were soiled from taking off the greasy burs—great splotches of grime showed—but he worked on, unmindful. A hose was hissing in the grass, while he bent over a wheel with a dripping rag.

Guy looked at him resentfully. Why didn't he hire a colored boy instead of getting out there himself where everybody could see him? And parading

around in those awful old clothes! A perfect scarecrow. And singing a hymn tune at the top of his voice! People going along the street could hear him. How could Guy expect to get very far with a father who didn't care any more about what people thought than that? Bee's father wouldn't go out in the yard with an old dirty cloth and screech away. He was a gentleman. It was a wonder that a nice family like the Chews would have anything to do with him.

Adrian Plummer turned the hose off nervously and left the buggy standing in its puddle of water instead of running it back into the barn. It was an almost unheard-of thing for Adrian Plummer to leave a bit of work unfinished.

Was this strange creature moving across the yard so confidently—now standing there with his hands in his pockets with a critical, superior smile on his face—his son? his own flesh and blood? Adrian Plummer asked himself.

"I've been waiting for you," said Mr. Plummer. "Please go into the 'study.'"

With his heart beating fast, Adrian Plummer went to the kitchen sink. The washpan was hanging on a nail and against the wall was a square of oilcloth to protect the wall from drippings. From the wire rack he took the soap and proceeded to scrub laboriously. When he appeared before his son he was in his formal black.

He sat down in his stiff, uncushioned chair and tried to speak, but it was not easy. His long, bony, thickened fingers moved uneasily. He yearned to lay them on Guy's hand.

What was this wall which reared itself up between him and his son? Had that invisible barrier a breach? His throat stirred.

"Guy, I—I want to talk with you. When you came walking in the yard, looking so sure of yourself, I could see you when you were a little shaver out on the farm. I was greasing the Sunday harness when you came toddling out to the barn with a stick in your hand. 'Papa, I found a dreat big worm.' That was what you said. Your mother and I used to laugh over it—after it was all over. I can see you now, standing there wearing a checkered dress with a big pocket in it. You were always so proud of that pocket. When I went to look it was a snake—a poisonous snake. I killed it. We don't always know what we are playing with, Guy. Things come to me now. When you were a month or two old you got sick and a blizzard was raging. But you had to have medicine. We didn't have a horse. We were poor then; so I walked to town. It was six miles. You can see this hand; that is why the fingers always look so big and swollen. They were frozen. But I finally got back with the medicine and you pulled through all right. I wanted you to continue my work in the Lord's vineyard, but you wanted to be a lawyer; it hurt me, Guy, but I never let on. Sometimes I was tempted to go into business so that we could have more money to spend on your education, but I have never deserted the Lord." His eyes shone, his throat moved with emotion. His constancy for the Lord was one of the big things in his life. "Then I began to see you drift off. That was what hurt, Guy—after all the years of hoping

and planning. There are more snakes than the serpents of the ground. That was the reason I was so stirred up that morning of our talk. Now I am so glad to know that you have given the Chews up. You don't know how happy it makes me. I'm sorry that I let my temper get away from me. It has been on my mind ever since, and now I just want you to know that I always want to do the square thing by you." And then Guy knew that in this halting, roundabout way his father was apologizing. Never had he known his father to apologize before; he had always been right—in his own opinion—and nothing could change him, and Guy knew what the decision must have cost him. Eagerly Plummer continued to talk; remorse had set in. He came closer and closer to Guy, his hands reached out to touch him, but never quite came in contact with him. Plummer's voice was trembling, his face was drawn, and the muscles were moving as Guy had seen them in the tense parts of his sermons.

"I must tell him that I haven't given her up," he said to himself, but another voice whispered: "Wait; not just yet. Maybe things will come out all right. Sometimes they are cured by letting them solve themselves." The dialogue continued.

At last his father paused. "When do you expect to leave for the university, Guy?"

Guy felt his palms growing hot. "I—I'm not going now—this fall, that is. You see, it is this way. I need a little more money and I am going to get books and ——"

His father put his hand on his shoulder joyously. "I've got a surprise for you, Guy. I wanted to tell

it in front of your mother, so that she could see you, too, but I will go ahead. I've been writing sermons for the *Quarterly* and doing extra work, and I have saved up all that money to give it to you. You will be surprised to know how much it is, Guy. Three hundred dollars! Lots of boys at the university have to work on the state farm, deliver laundry, fire furnaces, and so on, but you won't have to, Guy. You can give all your time to your studies. You may even be valedictorian of your class. Your mother would like that. Here's the book I have been depositing it in."

Plummer spread the thumbed bank book out before him.

"You can see how it has all been entered up. Some of them were not very big, but many a mickle makes a muckle, as the Scotchman says." He laughed. "I hope you'll study the poets, Guy, while you are young. After awhile life gets so busy. There's a big one—twenty dollars. That was for a funeral."

Guy stirred uneasily. What could he tell his father? the tall, gaunt man now beginning to turn gray who was hovering over him so eagerly? Was this the man he had looked down upon a few minutes before?—the man he had despised because he stood screeching in the back yard while he washed a buggy?

"I have been looking forward to it a long time," his father continued, "when you should go to the university. You know I went to a seminary. I milked two cows the winter I went. Sometimes I would forget to wipe the splashings off my shoes till I got to class. Then I took to carrying a rag, and when the professor wasn't looking I would reach

down under my seat and spruce up. And at the same time I was courting a girl." He smiled broadly in his growing humor. "I expect you will be doing the same. What is it you young fellows call it?—rushing 'em?"

"But, pa, I can't. I have decided not to go. I'm going to work at the store till I get some money ahead ——"

"Don't you see, Guy boy, you won't have to. That is all settled."

"I—I can't," said Guy, agonized. "I can't take your money."

"Of course you can. That's what I have been saving it all these years for. Your mother and I have been calling it your college fund. That made it easier to save."

Guy swallowed heavily. How surprising life was! How little had he thought, when he had come walking up to his father flopping the dirty old rag on the buggy, that his father could make any change in his life. You never know who is to influence your life. Now he could go to college. Or could he? What should he do? Life was so full of questions.

"That was certainly awfully nice of you, pa," he said.

He would wait; think it over; some way out would come to him. Of course, if one didn't get a college education while young one would never get it. Already he was older than most boys who went to college. On the way he would drop off at Kansas City and see Bee.

"Let's shake hands and begin all over again," said his father. Tensely he gripped Guy's hand and

his throat stirred. The wall was coming down. "Sometimes in the rush of things we—well, sort of lose track of what each other is trying to do. Suppose we hitch up Prince and take a spin. The buggy ought to look pretty good by now. I used that new piece of chamois on it."

Proudly he led the way. Even now in his exhilaration he carefully rolled up the hose and returned it to its hook in the barn; then put the notched board away.

"Which side would you rather sit on, Guy? It doesn't make any difference to me."

Prince rolled down the street. Plummer shook the lines over his broad back and turned to Guy, admiringly.

It was a proud moment.

CHAPTER XII

IT seemed ages before Guy received the first letter from Bee

He had rented a lock box at the post office and there she addressed him. It would not do to have her letters come to the house, nor to the store. No one in the world must ever see those letters but himself. He would learn them by heart; they would be stamped indelibly on his brain.

The first one was disappointing:

> DEAR G.—I arrived here all right and A. G. was down to the station to meet me all ok so I haven't anything to complain of. I haven't told her yet, but expect to to-morrow. I keep expecting to see somebody I know—I don't know why I should, though, because I don't know a soul in K. C. Be a good boy.
>
> B.

He looked under the stamp. Of course, upset as she was, there wouldn't be anything there. "A. G.," of course, was her Aunt Grace. Bee had probably written it on her knee. Naturally she couldn't put in an affectionate last line.

It was some time before he heard from her again. Finally she had got up her courage to tell A. G. and then she had felt better. To-morrow she was going to the hospital. Abruptly she closed. "Pray for me."

Guy had, fervently.

What minute would she go in the hospital? He

would like to know that. Or would he? What if she should—moisture was in his palms. Could he go through life with that hanging over his head? he asked himself. Other big men had lived with sadness hanging over them. Lincoln had. But, of course, she would come out all right. And he had prayed again. He realized where he was—in the little back room of the store. Hastily he started to go out, then came back. No! It had not been wrong—in the sight of God—and he would not run. Boldly he stayed and repeated the prayer, but this time it was not so long. Already his mind was off on something else.

What if she should die? Her father would be notified. The doctors would have to tell. . . . He dreaded to think of her father. What would happen to himself? "I wouldn't care, then, what did," he said, impassionedly, and returned to his work.

Day after day passed, week after week; the agony of suspense.

Then this came:

DEAREST GUY.—It is all right. Everything is over. A. G. is being just perfectly lovely with me. I am going to church with her to-morrow.

I think of you all the time. There are some things in life I cannot understand, but I wonder if anybody does, for that matter. A. G. says there are some things that we must take phillosophically (is that right? I was never a good speller like you) and not turn our backs on.

Could you wear a tie if I made it and sent it to you? I like to keep busy.

Yours very sincerely,

BEE.

"Thank Thee, O God!" whispered Guy, fervently.

He lived from one letter to another; he would

show her that he was faithful to her; he would not even "look" at another girl. When she came back he would take her into his arms and tell her again and again how much she meant to him.

Another letter came. Going to the high-wall desk at the post office, covered with its broken and rusted pens and smeared with ink and the witticisms of roughnecks, he opened it. Bee had decided to stay with A. G. for awhile and take music lessons. She had planned to go to K. C. some day, anyway, to a conservatory and now was her chance.

Guy was pleased. Anything which would make her forget what she had been through was welcome. She was gifted; she would throw herself into her music, make a great thing of it. My, the way she could make a piano rattle! He could see himself turning the music. Then he would take her into his arms and tell her how wonderful she was.

The long waits; they were dreadful. How slowly life moved. Then one day when the telephone rang he was astonished to hear her voice.

"Is that you, Bee?" he asked, excitedly. "When did you get back? Why didn't you tell me you were coming? When can I see you?" The questions bubbled from his mouth.

"You may come this evening, if you wish to," said Bee, more formally. "Papa is out of town."

It seemed strange that she should say that, but eagerly he went. Now things were straightening out. How should he act toward her? What should he say? Should he kiss her? Of course he would. He would not make such a fool of himself as he had at the train.

She met him in the "vestibule." Thinner, some-

what paler, she stood before him. She extended her hand matter-of-factly. He kissed her and felt a quickening, felt the same deep rush come over him. With a swipe of his heel he kicked the outer door shut. Her head lay inertly on his breast.

"Sweetheart, I am so glad to see you," he said. "It just seems years. Someway you seem holier than you used to."

"Come on in. I don't like to stand. Here," she said, as she drew him toward a billowy mountain of blankets and blue draperies, "is our child."

She drew back a veil and a red, wizened face stared up at him.

The floor seemed to roll and the bassinet to go into a jumble, but in the midst of it, as if forming the center of the revolving mass, was the dull, homely, red baby face.

"Bee, why didn't you —— I thought it was all over with."

"I couldn't—after Aunt Grace talked to me—so I just waited."

Was it possible that this little red thing was a part of him? Did he feel any love for it? He did not. It might as well have been a doll.

"I was sorry that you had all that suffering," he said.

"It was bad enough."

"And all this had to happen when we loved each other so much and prayed to God," he said, with quick resentment. "It ain't right."

She looked at him a moment, started to speak, but closed her lips; then turned to make the child more comfortable. She began to gurgle at the child in

baby talk. He looked at her in astonishment. What a strange, unknown person she was.

He moved uneasily. He must say something.

"What's its name?"

"Cecil," she said, pronouncing it in the Junction City manner as if it began "See—."

"I had a cousin by that name once," mumbled Guy. "She was a whistler in Chautauquas. Made a good thing out of it, too. They used to send us newspaper clippings, but now we never hear. Got married or something, I guess. They mostly do when they drop out of sight, you know."

He felt like kicking himself. Why had he said that foolish thing about marriage? It wasn't what he really thought; it was just what everybody said.

"May I kiss her hand?" he asked.

"It isn't a her—it's a boy."

Why had he made such a fool mistake? Of course, Cecil was a boy's name. There was Cecil Rhodes. Why had he gone on jabbering about his girl cousin who could whistle a little?

"It's a pretty name," he added, with what was meant to be great enthusiasm.

"He's a pretty child. Everybody at the hospital said so. The nurse told me she had never seen such a remarkable baby."

But Guy was not interested. To him all babies were alike. The child seemed curiously remote and unrelated to him. He wanted to talk about something else, but to Bee the child was everything. She was fighting for him.

Guy was off on another subject.

"People are going to talk. They're just like a pack of famished wolves on the trail—let one get down and the others are on top of him. But we'll show 'em. We aint licked. We're just beginning to fight." He walked the floor valiantly.

"He has your eyes," said Bee.

Guy looked at the staring child, unmoved.

"Isn't he awfully red?" he asked, impersonally.

"No, not at all. They have to spank them on the bottom of the feet to make them cry."

That was interesting; Guy wanted to know more about it. Bee noticed the difference. She had faced death, made a tremendous sacrifice, and had brought the child back to Junction City to brave the storm which must rise—and Guy wasn't interested in Cecil. Fiercely she loved the mite; already he was her passion.

Guy looked at Bee. Did he love her? He did not know. His mind was filled with what was going to happen. How would it affect his life? Could he go away to the university? His brain churned. He scarcely noticed that Bee had gone back to hover over the child.

He must do the square thing by Bee. Coming up, he put his arm around her impassive waist. "Bee," he said, "we must get married."

"It wouldn't do any good now."

"Yes, it would," he urged. "It would fix up everything."

"I've gone through this much—I can stand the rest."

"But, Bee, don't you realize what people are going to say?"

"I've had plenty of time to think about that. I must feed him now."

She took up the child and hesitated a moment, but Guy did not understand. Turning her back, she began to unfasten her waist.

Guy felt a quickened sensation; a curious moving. Facing in the other direction, he began to talk hastily, to make elaborate pretense that it was nothing.

"He always stares so when he eats," she said: "never blinks or anything."

Should he go to look at the child? He did not know.

"I suppose they all do," he said, impersonally.

"Oh no! The nurse said that some of them shut their eyes." She said it quickly, as if in defense.

Guy looked around for something to say. "There goes old man Hardesty"—he peered elaborately out the window—"all lit up again, as usual—crazy as a June bug." He rattled on for some moments, keeping carefully away from the subject that was in the minds of both. How much of life was talking about one thing and thinking about another!

"We could elope"—he turned to her excitedly—"go off some place and get married—to-night—to-morrow—or any time—before people find it out."

"You needn't worry about that. I know what I am facing. The doctor says I mustn't talk when I am nursing—the excitement reacts on baby."

Guy walked about the room aimlessly, while Bee sat gazing into the child's face. Guy could hear curious noises. At last, after mumbling on for some

time by himself, he left. Bee was still sitting staring down at the little red face.

That evening Mr. Chew arrived home from the city. He came up the front steps slowly. Once he had come so joyously, but now there was little to look forward to. On the center table were the letters which had come to the house during his absence. He ran through them, then went out to the kitchen and raised the hood of the small oven which encircled the stovepipe used to "warm" things. The coffee pot was there, as the cook had been instructed to leave it. Pouring himself a helping, Chew shook some sugar out of the bowl and drank standing. Then he started upstairs. Abruptly he stopped. There was a figure at the head of the stairs.

"Bee," he cried, "is that you? Good land! you nearly scared me out of a year's growth. Banquo's ghost come home at last!"

He folded her in his arms, patted her shoulders. He was young again; his chief interest in life had come back to him.

"Why in the world didn't you give a fellow notice? I'd have been down to the station to meet you with a band. You don't know what a start you gave me—first seeing your feet, then your skirt." He pinched her, gave her a bear hug. But Bee was not responsive; her arms drooped. She was intense, suppressed, but he did not notice it. He was too excited over her home-coming.

"Come with me, papa." She led the way.

"Moved back into your own room, have you? Well, I hope you never move out. I bet you've gone and got a present for your old dad. Just so it

isn't a box of cigars." He referred to a family joke when such a purchase had ended disastrously. He continued to talk.

"I have a baby," said Bee, quietly.

Chew glanced at her to see if it was a jest. The glance aroused a deep, stirring apprehension. About the room were evidences of baby things. He shook silently, reached out his hands, found his fountain pen and twisted it. The calm confidence of the court-room was no longer his. He was facing a reality.

"You—you mean?"

"It's mine. I had it in Kansas City."

He bent over the bassinet and stared at the wizened face. The infant's eyes were shut and its hands clenched. A dozen questions rushed to his mind, but he could only pull nervously at his pen.

"It's a boy. I have named him Cecil."

"How could you? How could you?" he kept repeating. "Whose is he?" he demanded, with fierce determination.

"Guy's."

He staggered; his hands clutched. "Was—that why you stayed so long?"

"I—I went for another reason—and then I decided I wanted him. Haven't I a right to him?"

The question went home. He had always taught her free ideas, the new outlook on life, and now he was faced with its results. He began to understand the forces which had been at work; the ideas he had sown had taken root. There was no one to blame but himself; the principles he had stood for had borne their bitter fruit. Was he right? Was Plummer, with his narrow concept, right? Was

anybody right? Chew's whole scheme of things rocked.

For a brief, revealing moment he saw what would happen to him! his practice would fall off; his prestige would go; no longer would he be the great man of the town. But his concern was for Bee. She would suffer; the community with all its narrowness and its crushing vindictiveness would come down upon her. He had conducted too many law cases not to know what this meant. But in the trials his interest had been intellectual. Now it was his own daughter!

The cloud lifted from Bee's face; she smiled with a new, consuming love.

"He's waking up," she said. "Don't you think he's cute?"

She bent over the infant, cooing with mother love.

CHAPTER XIII

GUY came and stood in the door of the kitchen where his mother was baking. At last he had brought up his courage to the sticking point. . . . Then some way must be found to tell his father.

"At it again, I see," he said, with an elaborate effort at casualness. "Got any crust left? You sure know how too cook, mother."

"Do you think so, Guy?" She was openly pleased. To her he was her wonder son.

His mother was a large, heavy woman, and from time to time as she worked she gave vent to prodigious but unconscious sighs. "Ohh-h myyy-y-y!" she breathed, with a suppressed groan. A few moments later her bulky bosom rose, expanded, then suddenly fell, while another huge "Ohhh-h myy-y-y!" spent itself over her thick lips.

What should he do? What should he do? That had been ringing through Guy's head. Why had it all happened? That everlasting row of question marks. What kind of a world was it? Why were people placed in it? It was all bosh about Adam and Eve. Nobody any more believed such twaddle. Still, there must be a God. So many things pointed to it. But why didn't God have some sense? It was blasphemous. . . . He could clear out, go to some big city—San Francisco, Chicago, even New York—change his name, and begin all over again. Lots of

men had. It would be easy—just get on the train. When he began to make money he would send it back. He could even pay the mortgage off his father's house. Just in the nick of time. He had read of such things. It had always seemed so noble. But there was Bee. There was the child.

Going away was alluring. The world seemed so much brighter and easier—some other place. He had heard of people walking out and not coming back for years. Many times he had heard his father tell the story of a man he knew back in Ohio. The man's wife had sent him out for an armload of kindling—and that was the last anyone saw of him. Twenty years later there was a knock at the door, and outside a man was standing with a load of kindling in his arms. "Here it is, Hannah," he said and dumped it into the wood box.

Guy could make just such a dramatic return. But some way or other he could not go, could not turn tail. It would not be the "square thing."

(Little did he know that it was the effect of his father's teaching. Seeds planted long before had taken root.)

"Mother, something's happened and I wanted to tell you about it."

She turned on him with a spoonful of frying lard suspended in one hand, and under the spoon she held her other hand, palm up, to catch any possible drippings.

"Ain't you feeling well?"

To her the greatest catastrophe was something physical. She was always worrying about the well-being of her family. To her they were always

"coming down" with something, or about to "catch" something.

"It isn't that." In spite of his effort to make it sound casual. Guy was swallowing and pulling at his fingers. "You know Bee Chew. Well, she has been away for some time and she's got a baby, ma."

Mrs. Plummer put the grease down on the table, where the tilted spoon began to overflow

"You mean she—she ain't married?"

Guy nodded. "Nobody knows about it yet. It's being kept a secret."

Abruptly Mrs. Plummer moved toward him and placed her hand on his bent head.

"Don't you go getting upset, Guy. She ain't worth it. There are plenty of good girls in the world. I suppose I oughtn't to say it, but I'm not surprised—with an infidel father."

"Ma, that isn't it. I—I gave her the baby."

Mrs. Plummer's bosom rose, then fell. "Ohhh-h myyy-y-y! O Lord! O Lord!" She sat down weakly. "It makes my head ache. Let me wash my face."

She waddled over to the sink, and as the water spattered she caught it up in the palms of her great hands and dashed it over her face. Then she went lumbering back to the roller towel.

"What will your father say? What will he do? To think this would happen to you! O Lord!"

She looked up, with the towel still in her hands. Her round, heavy face was drawn, her lips were moving, forming faint, indistinguishable echoes of her thoughts.

"Maybe it wasn't you, Guy. Maybe—maybe it was somebody else."

Guy shook his head. "Yes, it was, ma. I haven't any excuse. I thought it wasn't going to happen, but it did."

"Oh, my poor boy! Everything seems to come down on you." She seized his shoulder hopefully. "Did she lure you, Guy boy? Did she lead you on?"

"No, ma, nothing like that. I can't blame her."

"Such girls are cunning, Guy. It takes a woman to see through them. You being so smart, naturally she would like to have you. She's that kind, Guy."

"No, she's not," said Guy, excitedly. His voice rose until he was shouting. "She's not that kind at all. I tell you she's the nicest, sweetest girl in the world."

"Why, Guy, how can you say that? Didn't I see her that night at the social trying to get you? What does she care what other people say?—her father an infidel! I know that kind better than you do, Guy."

"She's too good for me, that's what she is, and I don't care who knows it."

Mrs. Plummer flung out her arms in despair. "O Lord! O Lord! Ain't there any way out of it?"

"I think maybe I could get her to marry me."

"No, Guy, no! We couldn't stand that—in the family. O Lord, do not desert us in our hour of trial!" she moaned.

At last the two were calmer.

"You must tell your father. O Lord! Oh my! My grease's running over." She wiped it up. "Do you want me to tell him?"

Guy shook his head. "I expect I better do it. I don't want to make you suffer."

"I don't mind that, Guy," she said, tenderly. "After a time you get used to such things. Kiss your mamma, darling."

Guy embraced her. Her heavy bosom rose and fell and in a moment she was shaking with sobs.

"You seem just like my little boy again," she whispered, thickly. "You was such a cunning baby. You don't mind if I hold you a minute, do you, Guy?" she pleaded.

Sinking into a chair, she drew Guy into her lap, while the chair complained under the weight. Taking his face between her hands, she kissed him fervently —kissed him as she had not done in years.

Guy's shoulders rose, fell; tears came to his eyes. He was crying

"My boy, my little boy!" she sobbed.

At last she released him. "I expect I got to be getting supper," she said.

"I guess I'll wait till after supper to speak to him," he said at last.

"He always feels better then."

What would his father say? What would he do —his father with his terrible temper, with his great, powerful hands?

At supper Adrian Plummer was light-hearted.

"If you don't mind," he said, indicating the plate of fried mush with a wave of his knife, "I'll just experiment with a little more. I sure married a good cook." It was his way of paying a compliment. "I hope you do as well, Guy." He noticed Mrs. Plummer sitting with a fork clasped in her hand, the point upright, staring silently at Guy. "What you look so solemn about mother? The cat got your

tongue? Have a sliver." He offered her the mush and mechanically the fork returned to her plate.

"Pa," said Guy, when the meal was over, "you got a minute to spare? I want to talk with you."

Adrian Plummer glowed. Guy was coming to him; his son who had been such a stranger.

"I always got time to talk. You know, that's the way I make my living," he returned, humorously. In his elation he rushed on: "By the way, look here at that old puzzle of yours. I have got it all put together. Your dad's smarter than you thought, isn't he?" He displayed a highly colored circus and menagerie, now with all the blocks in place. "It sure took some hard tusseling. Why, I could beat you with one eye shut and one hand tied behind me. This is the trick block that gives you the trouble. You see, there are two almost alike and that is where they fool you." He hovered over Guy as he explained his theory. Adrian Plummer cleared his throat as he struggled to say more. In his heart was eagerness for his boy and understanding of him.

"Just bring it into the 'study,'" he said. "We can spread it on my desk."

His hand fluttered over Guy as if to rest on him, but moved on again. He spoke eagerly.

"Sometimes, I suppose, I seem kind of hard, but you are young yet. The things of the flesh amount to little. It is character that counts. Steel must go through its fire. If it comes out all right all is well. And you are going to come out all right, Guy—something tells me that. Life is perplexing, Guy; it is intricate—like this puzzle. You think you know where this piece goes—this man or that woman—

and then you find that you are all wrong. What at first seems easy often proves the hardest of all. You were that way, Guy—I never seem able to fit you in. But I think I understand you better now. Here's a box of cigars I bought, Guy. It's the first one I ever smoked except one time when I was a kid back in Morgan County, when I smoked a rattan buggy-whip handle. I pretty near threw up my boot heels. It makes me laugh now, but, gracious! how sick I was. Take one and we'll light up together, only if I was you I wouldn't smoke cigarettes. After fighting them all my life I couldn't give in to them now. Wait a minute—I got a cutter. I didn't forget anything." He brought it from his pocket and proudly clipped off the end of Guy's cigar, then his own. "I used to be quite a checker player when I was a young sprout. How'd you like to go up against your old dad, Guy, while we smoke?"

Guy moved in agony. How could he tell him? How could he begin?

There was a ringing in his ears and his lips were so dry that he kept moving his tongue over them.

"Father, I want to tell you something."

Adrian Plummer beamed on his son. "Certainly, with pleasure. Go ahead."

"You know Bee Chew. I put her in a family way."

"I didn't understand, Guy."

"Bee Chew. I say, she has a baby—and—and I am the one that caused it."

Adrian Plummer swallowed heavily and stared at his son in dull bewilderment.

"You mean that you broke the law of God?"

"Yes."

"With the daughter of an infidel?"

"Yes."

Adrian Plummer rose numbly and, stumbling to the door, threw his cigar outside. Weakly he sat down, and his agonized voice cried out: "Guy! Guy! You! The Lord have mercy on my soul! Give me strength." His heavy, knotted hands reached out for Guy, then dropped back in his lap. "Go ahead, Guy, and tell me."

"I am in love with her. I want to marry her."

Adrian Plummer bent forward, his head on his study desk, while his great giant body shook.

"She went away, then came back. The baby is here in town." Brokenly, Guy told the story.

At last Adrian Plummer rose to his full gaunt height. His knobby hands were clasped as if to keep them within his power.

"Go, Guy, go quickly. Leave me alone."

Guy stumbled out. His mother—her big, square, heavy, face drawn and tortured—was waiting. "What is he going to do?"

Guy shook his head. "I don't know."

As they listened they could hear his heavy Bible opened on his desk. He was reading.

In his "study" Adrian Plummer stayed, alternately reading and walking up and down the floor. His step, heavy and without elasticity from following the soft corn rows of his early youth, echoed through the house.

Midnight came and the aoor nad not opened. The steps would stop, then could be heard the low mumble of his voice as he read the Bible. All night it continued, while Guy and his mother sat staring

at each other. What did this mean? What was the great struggle going on in Adrian Plummer's soul?

"O Lord, give me strength!" his agonized voice cried out.

At last the door opened and Adrian Plummer stood before them. There was no greeting; seemingly he did not see them. Quickly he passed through the room and out the door.

"Watch him," whispered Mrs. Plummer, hoarsely. "When he is having one of his spells he is as strong as two men."

In a moment he came back with the coal-oil can. He filled the lamp by which he studied, and methodically returned the can to its place in the cellar. His heavy, endless footsteps again resounded in his room.

All night he continued.

Adrian Plummer remained twenty-four hours in his "study," walking, reading, praying.

The fear grew.

"I think we had better send for Mr. Arnhalt," said Mrs. Plummer. "There ought to be a man in the house. I'm going in and try to explain things to your father. He can't see such things like a woman can."

He gave no heed to her knock. At last she entered.

"Adrian, I want to explain."

"I must be alone."

Abruptly, that afternoon, he appeared at the door. In his countenance there was light.

"He's come through all right," whispered Mrs. Plummer. "I'll have to get him something to eat."

It was not as she thought.

"Call my flock together," he said. "Bring mine people about me."

Again he returned to his "study."

Guy went with the message—from house to house of the members of the church. After a time they began to come down the street, walking wonderingly. The house was filled; then they went into the yard, but Adrian Plummer remained in his "study." The mumble of his voice arose.

"Is there going to be a curing," cackled Mrs. Gropper. "All I got to say is, if it's an arm I hope it don't go stiff on them again like mine did on me."

Chairs were brought and benches from the barn. When the people talked it was in whispers. The yard was filled and people gathered in the street. Guy felt the impressiveness of it, knew that it concerned him, and yet he did not know what it meant. Why had his father prayed for twenty-four hours? Why had he sent for his "flock?" he asked himself.

There was a hush and all eyes turned to the door of his father's "study" which opened upon the porch.

"He's coming," they whispered.

His father appeared in his stiff Sunday black. The long tails of his coat came below his knees. How many times Guy had seen him put on that suit and go to church, funerals, and weddings. How many times on Saturday afternoons he had seen him put it on an ironing board between two chairs, press it, and then on a cheap-advertising hanger carry it to the closet under the stairs. And how many times he had seen him wash the celluloid cuffs, bending over with determined intentness as he scrubbed the black left by the brass buttons. Guy could now feel his power,

that strange something which moved people. There was an impressive dignity about his father—the fervor of some misguided crusader.

Adrian Plummer stopped at the porch railing and closed his eyes—he was praying for "strength."

Guy felt stirred; knew that some catastrophe impended.

Abruptly his father began to speak.

"Brothers and sisters, as Paul of Tarsus sent out and gathered his believers about him, so to-day have I asked for my little flock. I am going to tell you something that wrings my heart. Whatever, in my poor frailty, I have been, I have been honest. I have done my duty as I have seen it and I shall do so now."

Guy looked at the people sitting in the yard, staring up at his father with open mouths. Mrs. Gropper was leaning forward, a hand cupped behind her ears—she was going to hear something that would furnish her a topic of conversation for weeks. The benches were sinking into the soft earth; bending over, a man slipped the fragment of a shingle under a leg. People came to hang over the fence, listened a moment, then came in. Farmers driving past stared curiously; a boy in a grocery wagon went rattling by on the vitrified-brick paving, the wheels grinding and screeching. But Adrian Plummer heard nothing. Beginning with Junction City, and going backward in time he was telling the story of his life. He dwelt on the different pastorates he had had, how he tried to serve them, his long rides into the country, his calls to deathbeds, his struggles. At first Guy recognized the different "calls," but soon they dealt with experiences before he was born.

Adrian Plummer's tone changed. "It was then, brothers and sisters," he said, hoarsely, "that the temptation of the flesh overcame me. I met a daughter of God, a sweet, innocent girl. I deceived her, I committed the great sin—I who now stand before you. The flesh had me in its lustful grip and I broke the sacred word of God. Oh, friends, friends!" His voice trembled and it was some moments before he could proceed. Mrs. Gropper now had both hands up; there was a deep, profound stirring on part of the audiences. "I tried to bury the guilt in my soul, but guilt cannot be buried. I was young and ambitious and I looked upon a career with the eager eyes of youth. I wished to become a learned man, a lawyer."

The picture of Calhoun, which Guy had found in his father's garret, came before him. It had once been his father's ambition to emulate such a career . . . then after a time the picture had gone to the garret. Guy choked, felt a sudden warmth for his father. The picture seemed to typify his father's ambitions. And then carelessly Guy had taken it to his drug-store room to stop a stovepipe hole.

His father continued his moving story; he had tried to outrun his soul, to escape the consequences —finally to see that such could not be done. With fierce determination he had turned his back upon his career and become a country preacher.

Guy looked at his father in wonder. Had his father, too, had the same fierce passions? the same deep longings? the same moving impulses? Never had he associated them with him· his father had

always seemed so far above them, so free from the toils of the flesh.

His father continued and Guy realized that his father was laying bare his soul before the people. He held back nothing; spared himself in no way. Only a person with deep and unalterable courage could have told the story—the story which all these years had been hidden in the depths of his soul. And Guy had laughed at his whiskers, made fun of his old-fashioned ways. Suddenly Guy felt contrition, sorrow. Was this the man he had lived with so many years and had paid so little attention to? Why, he was a great soul!

And then Guy realized that his father was talking about him!—"his first-born," "seed of his flesh," "offspring of his loins." The people turned to him; eyes stared. Guy felt deep indignation. What right had his father to make the people stare at him so?

"I shall now tell you of my son," his father was saying, "before it comes to you as gossip. My son—my son, Guy—has committed adultery. You will soon hear; the girl's name will be dragged down. It's man's way. Some of you already may know, but I bring you here together to tell you that you may not blame him. The sin is deeper. Blame me!"

His breast rose; he clutched his hand and moved it across his shiny black coat until it was resting over his heart.

"It's God's punishment come down on me. He has raised me to power, let me grow proud, and now he has heaped His punishment on me—after all these years. My sins have found me out. My deception is over. You now see me as I am—the blackest

among you. I will resign from the church. That will be settled. No more will pretense be mine. You now know me as I am. You may now go."

Turning with dignity, he moved slowly to his study. The door closed.

The people started down the street, going quite two blocks before they began to gabble. . . . All these years! What a sensation! And Guy! Well, it wasn't surprising about Guy—he had always been wild.

But the girl—who was she? Yes, who was the girl?

They could hardly walk fast enough.

CHAPTER XIV

JUNCTION CITY pulsed with excitement. It was startling for a father to call the people together and tell them that his son was the guilty person—and then announce that he himself, in an earlier day, had committed the same sin. They saw nothing of the simple heroism of Adrian Plummer declaring to the world, before gossip could spread, that his son had done a great wrong, and then trying to share the blow by showing that Guy was not to blame—that it was the working out of God's will. They saw none of that; it was gossip—something to talk about. How exciting! Tongues wagged; telephones rang; people called over back fences. It became a matter of distinction to have been one of the crowd. A number of them felt quite "put out" because they hadn't received word in time to go.

They began on the girl. Soon they knew it was Bee. Again tongues wagged; more trips to the back fence. It was splendidly amazing—Bee Chew, the prettiest girl in town, the daughter of the richest man. All who had looked up to her as being above them were secretly glad—they couldn't get enough details. So this was the way she was taking music lessons in Kansas City! How they had swallowed it! She had been haughty; had carried herself with such an air; now she would find she wasn't better than anybody else. Soon they were walking up and

down in front of her house, talking behind their hands.

When Chew heard of Plummer's announcement from his porch, his indignation flamed up. Plummer's son had brought about the fall of his daughter, and now Plummer had made it a hundred times worse by openly calling attention to it. He saw himself in no way related to the case; Plummer had caused it all. Plummer with his stiff-backed Christianity had brought it about. While Plummer had been shouting his religion, his son had deliberately led his daughter to ruin. He could see no other side. Plummer was at the bottom of it—Plummer with his hypocritical religion.

Chew did not hesitate; immediately he started for the Plummer house. It was no time for law's delay—he who had always been so calm and dispassionate. He would settle the matter with Plummer, face to face.

Adrian Plummer was in the barn—the house was now no place for him. He could not go to his beloved "study." Once it had been a solace to him; there he could retire from the world, there he could think, walk the floor, shout his fiery utterances, but now there was Mrs. Plummer to face. Even now, from time to time, she came to the window and looked at him forebodingly. He had brought to the barn his old worn Bible and had attempted to find comfort in it, but he could not keep his mind on it. His finger would stop in the middle of a line; he would hold it there for some minutes while he stared into space; then guiltily he would come back to his reading. After a time he put the book aside. The

great strain was now over; he was hollow-eyed, haggard. Some time before there had been carried to the barn from the kitchen an old discarded chair; its bottom had fallen out and now papers spread over the broken cane served as a seat. He was now sitting on it, his thick, heavy hands folded loosely in his lap. From time to time he breathed heavily. After the crowd had gone he had changed from his Sunday black and was now in his everyday suit. He had taken off his collar, for a stiff laundered collar still hurt his neck. He would never be able to get used to it. His long, bony neck came abruptly out of his shirt. From time to time his shoulders rose and fell; he was suffering. The calmness and power with which he had faced the curious people were now gone; the reaction had set in.

There was the sound of some one approaching, but Plummer did not look up. He continued to stare at the wall before him. Behind him, Prince munched at the hay, but Adrian Plummer had no word for his old friend.

Chew's white, enraged face appeared in the door.

"So this is where you are hiding!"

Plummer looked up quickly; his old enemy was upon him.

"I hide from no man."

Chew clawed the door open and stood threateningly before Plummer in the wreck of the chair. Words fought to get out.

"The barn is a fit place for you—or over there in the manure pile. You pretend to be so all-fired holy, going around with that smug face of yours telling people the right and proper way to live, and

all the time your heart is as black as mud. It's just such as you that destroy all faith in religion and make churches a joke. You fake people into thinking you can cure them, and you can't any more than I can, and you know you can't—if they didn't think so. You get your bunch around you and you run a show out of town and think you have done a fine heavenly act, and there wasn't a girl in the show who wasn't a hundred times better than you. At least, they were what they pretended, and that's something you've never been. Your whole life has been a deception."

Plummer's head sank lower and lower. His fighting spirit was gone—the spirit with which he had faced Chew that Sunday morning on the way to church. When he spoke his voice was husky. "I can say nothing. It is all true."

Chew began upon Guy. "And your boy is just as bad. He deliberately ruins my girl and sets her adrift—and that's what you call Christianity. That's the kind of son you have—a seducer."

Chew continued while Plummer's breast rose, but Chew gave no heed. He was crowding closer and closer, thrusting his face up into the bearded one of the old minister. Plummer's lips were mumbling a Bible text, "For the love of Christ constraineth us."

"Why don't you say something?" demanded Chew, "instead of standing there mouthing?"

Suddenly Adrian Plummer's body sprang into action. Chew was snatched from his feet by a great and powerful force; there was kicking and scuffling, groans, grunts, and Adrian Plummer with the lawyer in his grip ran with him across the yard. Lifting

him up with his prodigious strength, he flung him into the street.

"Don't you ever enter my yard again—and thank the Lord that He stayed my hand."

A crowd had gathered, awed at the sudden fury of it. Turning, Plummer walked past the men; his old power had returned. His shirt was now torn and smeared, but about him was an impressive dignity.

"The curious may now go," he said. "They will see no more."

The rest of the day he spent in the barn. He tried to find something about his beloved buggy to do. But the buggy did not need washing; its top did not need oiling; grease did not need to be cut from its hub caps. He ended by climbing up in the seat and sitting in the attitude of driving—as so many times he had done on the way to the lone farm funerals and on hurried, midnight deathbed calls.

At the store, as the days went by, Guy numbly and impersonally waited on customers. Once the store had seemed a place of possibilities—the base from which he was to start into life, as the early pioneers had had a point from which they had traveled into the unknown. But now it seemed to come about him, to shut him in. What was he to do? Why had he been such a fool? It had all been his fault. There wasn't anybody he could blame. He had known what he was doing and had walked into it openly. He was bad, bad all the way through. And then he thought of his father. He could still feel the power shown when his father had stood on the porch, his head erect, in a clear, loud voice pitilessly

baring his innermost soul to the astonished people. Now it would ruin his father.

In a moment another mood came over him; that curious, haunting, ever-present mood about sex. Was it possible that his father, now so aloof and removed from passion, had had all these emotions? Of course he had! Hadn't he just told it before all these people? But where had it happened? What kind of girl was she? Had his father kissed her neck and quoted poetry?

Then, suddenly realizing, he felt ashamed of himself. Why couldn't he think the kind of thoughts that he wouldn't be ashamed for other people to know about? Once he had heard a Chautauqua lecturer speak on noble thoughts. Suppose, he had said, that a great, cold, congealing blast of air should strike you, freezing your thoughts in your brains, then if somebody cut off the top of your skull and looked down in it and saw your own true thoughts, what kind of thoughts would they find in *your* head? It had made a profound impression on Guy—and now he was having thoughts that he wouldn't let anyone see for the world. What a low bum he was! Why couldn't he go through life and not have all those shameless thoughts—the way other people did? If people knew at bottom what he really was they would spurn him; he would be a stench in their nostrils. He liked the phrase. He had heard his father use it many times and now he repeated it over and over to himself, unsparingly. He continued to goad himself.

It was awful to take a sweet, innocent girl and make her an outcast. Bitterly he hated himself.

He was the scum of the earth. He wasn't fit to speak to. He ought to be run out of town. He had heard of such things—tar and feathers. "Shotgun weddings." He had heard of that, too. In the early days when Junction City was "settling up," a preacher or a justice of the peace had been sent for and the man was married to the girl whether he wished or not. That was what Guy must do—marry the girl. It was simple. If he had only done so before, things now wouldn't be so bad. He would go to Bee's house and ask her.

"Then let 'em talk," he said, fiercely. "I'll make her the most respected woman in town. She'll be so far above them she'll need a spyglass to see them, the old sapheads."

His mood changed. Customers came in, staring openly at him as if he were some alien creature suddenly thrust into their midst; but in his new mood he waited on them with elaborate care. "Is there anything more, Mr. Downey? Glad to serve you any time we can. Call again." It was a formula he had learned from Wolf and he employed it extravagantly. He would put them in their proper places—the little puny things who came smelling around his shoe tops.

Another mood was upon him. He wasn't so bad! Look at the bunch of fellows in Junction City who were constantly going out on adventures and nothing ever happened to them. Look at Harlan Thompson; the night of "The Gay Hottentots." Harlan had been a hero and constantly he was running down to Kansas City and coming back with winks and suggestions which made him the center of attraction.

Guy could name a dozen men—some of them married—who had had their adventures and had come free. It wasn't right. There was no justice in life. He would rise above it and make people change; he rebelled splendidly.

He would straighten things out. He would marry Bee. Then let them talk. What did he care? Some other sensation would come along pretty soon and they would forget all about Bee and him. Bee was sweet; she was pretty; she always brought out the best in him—he could talk to her so much better than to any other person. Who else in town could talk so wonderfully about Browning and the human soul? Not one, he said confidently. He thought of the times he had gone to her from the store, tired and out of sorts, and soon he would be talking in his best manner, even orating, flaunting his arms. Bee was a real inspiration!

There had never been any good reason why he hadn't married her; just one thing and another; waiting, maybe things would turn out all right; putting it off. Now he would go to her, take her in his arms, kiss her, and everything would be all right. . . . He could see the way the hairs grew on the back of her neck, tapering off so gracefully; the little depression; the soft white expanse of her bosom. Again he felt a glow. . . . It was exhilarating just to think of her.

It seemed hours before he could get away. At last nine o'clcok came and he was free. Hurrying into the back room of the store, he slipped off his coat and, hanging it over the back of a chair, began washing up. From side to side he turned, craning into the mirror, twisting his mouth and contorting

his face, staring into the depths of his pale-blue eyes. He had good teeth and an attractive smile. He was handsome. How ecstatically Bee had whispered it into his ears. How she had liked to run her fingers through his wavy brown hair which had such an impertinent way of suddenly rising up from his forehead. Wouldn't it be wonderful again to feel the soft mystery of her fingers in his hair? . . . He combed it carefully; he began to whistle; picked up his coat from the back of the chair. . . . and suddenly stopped. It was the chair they had sat on that night. There was the iron bed, once white, but now chipped and rusted, beside which they had knelt and prayed.

"Yes, and it didn't do any good," he thought, fiercely; and a moment later felt a rush of shame. Maybe all this had come on him because he had doubted God. But there was his father. He had always believed so devoutly in God. That ought to prove something; but he could not think what it was. Did anything prove anything? Could anything absolutely be proved? What a confusing wilderness the world was! Did other people have doubts and hopes and unnamed longings? What were people, anyway? Look at the thousands of worlds—possibly millions—all whirling away, and the earth one of the smallest of the bunch. It could be dropped out and wouldn't even be missed. And what were the people crawling around on it? Less than nothing. Ants on a monstrous pumpkin; no bigger, no more important. So why should he be afraid of them? People would talk, but let them. He felt quite exalted.

He turned to take a final look at himself in the mirror.

Squaring his shoulders, he went out in the alley, and in a moment he was swinging down State Street, full of his noble resolve.

Mrs. Gropper, returning from prayer meeting, ceased mouthing her endless gossip a moment to stare at the brisk figure.

"Hmmmm! Cutting just a big a swath as ever, ain't he? Well, I've seen 'em fly high before—and roost low!"

The Chew house was dark when Guy reached it; it looked gloomy. Guy remembered the first time he had seen it—just after his family had moved to Junction City. He was in the buggy with his father, driving into the country, where his father was to officiate at a wedding. The house with its roof of colored slate had seemed the most wonderful home he had ever gazed upon. And there were the pillars and pergolas and swinging buckets of flowers. Then it would have seemed wonderful to enter such a mansion; now he was making up his mind whether or not to marry the daughter. He had come up in the world. Immediately he was ashamed of himself—exulting over his progress in life when in the house was the girl he had ruined.

Her father was evidently at his office. A light went on. It was in Bee's room. Evidently she had been sitting in the dark, possibly thinking; and what thoughts! The bitterness of them came over him. He ought to be kicked off the place; nothing was too severe. He paused beside the lawn swing where he and Bee had sat laughing and talking. He sat

down; the swing creaked and he rose, rose hastily. What difference did it make? He had come to see her; was going to fix up everything. Maybe she would come out and sit with him. No, that would not quite do. He didn't know why, but it didn't seem just the thing.

Dimly he could see her moving around inside. He thought she had her hair down her back. Once how it had thrilled him.

"I must be awfully gentle," he said. "I don't know a tenth of the suffering she's gone through."

He stood under her window, looking up. He felt a queer rush of remembrance; of trying to fit something in its proper place; a vague, tantalizing something. Then it cleared; it was under this window that he had stood the night he had fled from Tootsie, the Gay Hottentot girl. Tears had come to him that night and he had knelt and prayed; now he was trying to make up his mind whether to go in and marry Bee. How life changed! What a miserable worm he was! With what high and lofty ideals he had come that night—and then how he had treated Bee; turned away—in fact, run—from a girl who had given him open invitation, to creep up on Bee and forever ruin her life. Shooting was too good. In a moment he found himself crying. Dropping down on his knees, as he had on that other night, he clasped his hands in the same attitude of supplication.

"O God, help me get out of this and do the right thing by her. Thank thee. Amen."

He brushed off his knees and wiped his eyes. He felt better. Now he would go in. When he came out he would be a happier man.

He looked back over his shoulder. What if somebody should see him? No! he was not a criminal—he didn't have to sneak. Going back to the sidewalk, he came in the gate and walked briskly to the front door and rang the bell.

"Who's there?" a voice called.

"It's I—Guy," he said, properly. Once he had made common mistakes; but they were fewer, except sometimes when he was excited.

Bee in her dressing gown let him in. How small she looked! What a difference high heels made!

"I suppose you want to see the baby."

"I want to see you." He took her hand eagerly. "Bee, I want to have a big, long talk with you—just like we used to."

"Well," she said, after a moment's hesitation, "come on in the sitting room then. I'm not very much dressed up. I was just getting to bed. Baby fussed a good deal last night."

He put his arm around her and drew her to him. He was choked with emotion and had to clear his throat before he could speak. Why, just at the moment he wanted to be at his best, did he have to hawk and bellow in his throat?

"Bee, I've thought it all out and I want to tell you about it. You know I love you and I want you to marry me. We can rent a little house, or maybe one of those new flats they are putting up in that brick row back of the church, and we can be real happy. As soon as we get a little money ahead we can move to Columbia and I can go to college and everything 'll come out all right. That 'll shut people's mouths. You know, life's a long race and we are just beginning.

Do you remember 'Invictis' that we used to recite—back in the old days?

> "I thank whatever gods may be
> For my unconquerable soul."

He quoted it fervently.

"Our heads are bloody, but unbowed. Come on, Bee, we'll show them."

Guy drew her into his lap and held her in a fervid embrace.

"Don't you think it would be wonderful—just us two alone?" Why had he made such a blunder? he asked himself. "I mean, we three." Both felt the awkwardness.

Bee stiffened in his lap.

"There, he's stirring now." At the door she paused and her voice changed. "Do you want to come up and see him?"

Fool that he was, why hadn't he thought of that before?

"Yes, very much," he said, pretending eagerness.

He walked awkwardly into the room. Even now there was something moving, something that took a grip on him, to walk into a room which she claimed as her own. In a corner was a wicker cradle with blue tufts of pillows showing over the sides. Once in the blissful days of their semiengagement they had stopped by common impulse before the display window of the furniture store where a bedroom set was on view. Neither had said anything, but by common impulse, expressing an idea deeper than they themselves knew, had paused to look at it. In the window was a crib like this one. Guy had felt a

flush and hastily had drawn away. And now it was boldly before them.

Guy bent over the infant and looked at it in a detached way. Was this curious, hairless creature a part of him? It seemed to bear no more relation to him than other red objects mothers, for some unknown reason, had exhibited to him.

Guy saw that he must win Bee through the child; he must appear enthusiastic. He tried to fix an adoring expression on his face; must say something.

"Gee! he's little!"

What an absurd thing to say. Of course, he was little—any kid would be.

"He doesn't cry much. You know how some babies do."

"Yes, it's awful," he agreed, heartily—"just about all the time. Hasn't he got a cute expression on his face now?"

The child was lying placidly, staring at nothing. Why was it he couldn't think of the proper thing?

"I think he knows me," said Bee, with profound fondness. "I can see a difference when the nurse comes in the room."

She began to coo over the infant, making curious gurgling sounds—oblivious of Guy's presence.

He moved from foot to foot while she continued her adoration, wishing he could think of something to say. How queer life was! One never knew what was going to happen next. That this should happen to him, of all people! It seemed unbelievable. For a brief moment he caught a glimpse of himself as some distant and remote figure, with his real self merely as an onlooker. If some one had told him, a year

ago, that he would be standing by the side of a baby cradle listening to a woman gurgle over a child that was his, he would have laughed at the idea. Now it was a real thing; he was experiencing it; it was happening right under his nose. To look back, it seemed entirely logical and natural, but to imagine it in advance made it seem absurd. But she concerned him much more than the child. Some way or other it didn't seem to count. Pretty soon it would be squawling. They all did. But he must use it as a means of getting her interest. He thought he moved very adroitly, little suspecting that he was an open book to the more skilled in this measure of wits.

"Who do you think he looks like?" he asked at last.

That wasn't correct. It was "whom." It was hard to get such things right. If only his parents—especially his mother—did not make such mistakes. He wondered dimly if anybody else had such struggles. But Bee would notice. He cleared his throat behind his hand. "I mean, who is it you think he looks like," he stammered. Quickly hope came to him; an argument was going on in him, with hope triumphing: no she wouldn't notice, especially as she was giving all her attention to the child.

"He's the perfect image of you." And again she began to coo to the child.

"Of course you can't tell much yet."

Abruptly Bee stopped her cooing and looked at Guy. "Yes," she said, slowly, "he may change."

Guy did not get its significance. He had lost interest in the child, now curiously looking around the room. He felt a quickening, a thrill. He was really in

the sacred precincts of a girl's room. After all, what funny creatures they were! What strange things they had! (The baby's belongings he passed over with hardly a glance.) What queer-shaped bottles on the dresser; and rows of toilet articles. Peering out of a closet were fluffy pieces of intimate wear. It would be wonderful to live in the same room with a girl; to be able to look at such things boldly, unabashed, instead of having to steal surreptitious glances.

"Bee," he said, stirred by sudden impulse, "why can't we get married? There's really nothing in the world to keep us from it. Then it would stop the mouths of all these old hens."

He put his arm around her and drew her toward him; and as he did so he felt his throat grow thick and a curious dryness come to his lips.

Bee remained impassive in his arms; but he said no word of love. It was merely a means to clear themselves.

"That will settle everything," he urged. "In a few years it will be all forgotten." He drew her closer in a spasm of delight as the future unrolled before him. "You and I are going to leave these people so far behind that they won't even know they are running. Some day they are going to be proud just to have us notice them. Say you will, Bee!"

Suddenly she seemed very wonderful and very beautiful, and he kissed her hotly. But Bee remained impassive.

"There's Cecil," she said.

"Yes, I know. Of course we want him."

Abruptly she drew herself out of his arms. "It's

no use pretending, Guy. You don't want him. You look on him as a nuisance. You wouldn't care if he died."

How she had gone to the bottom of him; pierced him. He himself hadn't really known that he had had such thoughts.

He denied them indignatly. "How could you say such a thing? I think he's awfully cute. Why, I love him!" he said magnanimously.

She shook her head. "You only think you do—now while you are talking." She began arranging the infant's clothes composedly.

"I love both of you," he said, stubbornly. "You know I do. I got you into this and I want to get you out."

"Yes—that's just it."

How adroitly she moved; how she could lay things bare. And he had been the best high-school debater in the state and was studying to be a lawyer, and she was cleverer than he was.

"No, that's not just it—I'll marry you to-morrow."

"It's no use. You're merely offering to do something magnificent."

Now that she was withdrawing from him, clearly putting herself away from him, it seemed the most necessary thing in the world to have her. He continued to plead, watching her as she arranged the baby's countless articles.

"Be reasonable. Can't you see that people are going to talk—talk their fool heads off."

"I thought of that long ago. As long as I am doing it for Cecil I don't mind. I made this while I was waiting." She displayed a dainty coverlet.

"Only I made it in pink. I was so sure it was going to be a girl. Aunt Grace made the little booties." The conversation was back to the child and she began to display his wardrobe with new interest. "Had you noticed what long hair he has? Some babies don't have any, you know." She filled with sudden feeling. "He is starting off with a terrible handicap. I know what it means, but I am going to fight for him." She glowed with the intenseness of her feeling. He looked at her in surprise. What was this new power dawning in her? How little did he know her! She glanced at a white ivory clock in her boudoir set. "It's time for him to go sleepie now. We will have to go." She turned off the light.

"I—I suppose I will have to go, too."

"Yes; he's a light sleeper."

He found himself waiting at the front door. In a moment he would be out; she was slipping away from him.

"Bee! Bee!" he implored. "Aren't you going to marry me? You must, you must! If you wait, it's going to be too late."

"Hsshsh!" she whispered, shaking her finger in the direction of upstairs. "We have to be careful when he's just getting to sleep." Her voice changed and she was speaking to him, "It's too late now, Guy."

He found himself outside. He went down the street excoriating himself. What a mess he had made of things. He hadn't even kissed her good-by! How once they had clung to each other on parting! The only time to-night he had taken her in his arms

to kiss her, was when he had seen a prospect of their life together and passion was upon him. What must she think of him! What a mumble-headed fool he was! What a bungle he had made of life!

CHAPTER XV

THE town began to "come down" on Guy.

A member of the community had been injured; one of the oldest and most necessary laws of society had been transgressed and the evildoer must be punished. Unless the father of the girl chose to swear out a warrant and drag the culprit into court, there was no legal satisfaction to be had—but there was more than one way to skin a cat. And so the skinning began.

There was the Cultura Club. It was made up of the "best ladies" in town. It met once a week, studied vital things, and kept abreast of the times. Mrs. J. Myron Seevers, its president, was a "force in the community." She was a tall, bony lady with a quick, driving method of talking and who prided herself on being able to put things over. When she got behind a proposition it went; she had that reputation and enjoyed it. Resting her weight on the ball of her right foot (as she had been taught to do the two seasons she had gone to a boarding school near St. Louis), she gesticulated constantly by opening and shutting her right hand and thus "driving the message home."

Mrs. Seevers poised herself carefully and her fingers began to twitch. Now that the regular business was over, there was one thing she wished very much to bring to the attention of the members.

It concerned a most unfortunate matter that had happened in their midst. One of the sweetest and loveliest girls in town had paid what women must always pay, while the man was going free. It had always been thus, since cave days, and as usual the man—Guy was now "the man"—was going his way unhampered and unhindered. Probably he was sorry *now*—that kind of man usually was—but in a few months he would forget all about it. Then no doubt he would be looking for new victims. It was their duty as mothers, as citizens, as guardians of the hearth and home, to do something about it. This thing which had been going on since the beginning of time should be stopped. The way to stop it was to show united public disapproval—make an example of the man who had brought it about. The trouble was that women were prone to let things go on just as they were, as they had gone on for generation upon generation. Woman was made an outcast and the man was a hero. Well, not exactly so bad as that, but he had never been made to feel that he was the guilty one. Must the woman always bear the scarlet letter—whether it was an actual insignia on her breast or a child in her arms—or should the man be made to share the ignominy? As mothers they should *go to the bottom* of this and act as a body. They should draw up resolutions that as long as his employer continued to keep him in his employ none of the members would patronize his store; if he still refused, there were other methods. For her own satisfaction she had gone to the trouble of looking up who owned the mortgage. Her fingers fairly flew; she was triumphant.

The resolutions were drafted.

After the meeting was over she confided to a few listeners that she had gone to Bee personally, and that, as much as she hated to admit it, Bee hadn't shown so much contriteness as she had expected. In fact, Bee had been indifferent, but after she had had a talk with her Bee had seemed to realize the seriousness of her act a bit more clearly and at last tears came in her eyes. The next day she had sent Bee flowers to show her that she still had friends.

The people of the town began to make Guy realize his sins. They gathered in front of the drug store, whispered, and then stared at the curiosity which had suddenly come among them. Entering, they bought lozenges while they looked at the strange animal; then went back to tell how Guy still had his feathers up.

Opinion began to run: He had always been "flighty." Wasn't built square on the ground. Like father, like son.

As Guy was coming to work one morning, his soul tortured with his struggle, a group was standing on the sidewalk, smoking, spitting, suddenly ha-ha-ing.

"There he comes," they whispered, and nudged one another. Silently they watched him pass, their eyes feeding on every detail. Then a snicker arose.

"He still thinks he's some stepper," said one of them. "Did you get it?—chin cocked up in the air and his arms flapping, this way." With that the sidewalk comedian pranced after Guy with an exaggerated step, imitating Guy's loose-jointed, swinging stride, and his peculiar manner of moving his arms from his elbows down.

A guffaw of laughter awarded his efforts and they looked eagerly to see if Guy would turn—to see if he would "do something"—but Guy marched on.

"I speak mit sorrow," said Wolf, when he entered, "but I must t'ink of me und der store first. Die vimmen come und t'ey go acrosst der street to some place else if I keep you for mein clerk. I must say goot-py. You are yoost as goot as some of dem I hate like a pup mit der poison, but I must live always."

The Cultura Club had gone to the bottom of things.

The word flew up and down the street. The chorus was at it again: "I guess that 'll take some of the kink out of his hair." "Maybe he won't be parading up and down the street so now." "I been expecting it."

The town began to pick him to pieces, to sink the tooth of revenge. It was the proper topic of discussion wherever people gathered. They relished it in the Monopole Barber Shop. After all, Guy hadn't been so much. He could spout a little hot air, but that was all. How had he ever got the reputation for being so darned smart, anyway? There were half a dozen boys in town who could put it all over him. Decent, self-respecting boys, too. He had probably been carrying on for months—who knows, maybe years. Look at the old man. A dog could never outrun its tail. If Guy was the kind of fellow who would deliberately get a girl into trouble, then goodness knows what else he would do. Look at the way he had acted that night of the box social—spent money like a drunken sailor. No telling what other things he had been up to.

Ed Hoecker entered. He had come yawningly from the breakfast table. The Commercial House was going to the dogs. They had put on some old hag of a biscuit shooter who looked like the wrath of God. The town was dead. If the company didn't give him a better territory he'd tell them where they could get off.

He must be drawn in; the ball must be kept going.

"I guess there wasn't any love lost between you and our young friend Guy, was there?" asked the genial barber.

"It wouldn't put your eye out."

The barber took up the cup with Hoecker's name flourished in gold letters on it. "By the way, Ed, when was your store robbed, anyway?"

Hoecker told him.

"Right after you run the box up on the young gentleman, wasn't it? *Hmmmm!* Quite a coincidence, wasn't it?"

The tinder was fired; they began to compare notes, to put two and two together. The barber, come to think about it, had heard R. L. Arnhalt say, setting right here in this chair, that he had seen Guy coming up the alley that night. At the time he hadn't thought anything about it, but now it did seem queer. There were others who could throw light on it. It was delicious; it was the most exciting morning the shop had known in a long time. Everything anybody knew about Guy was taken out and aired . . . to come back to the incident in the alley . . . buzz . . . buzz.

Hoecker sat up, tufts of lather in his ears. "Well now that we are on the subject, I don't mind telling

you I always had my suspicions. But I didn't want to say anything, knowing how he seemed to stand in the town and I hadn't been here very long, so I kept my mouth shut." It pained him through and through to say a single word, but before he left he managed to add to the gathering suspicion.

The barber in his white apron came up the steps and looked around. He spoke to a loafer roosting on the bank steps. "If you see Harry Tootle tell him to drop in, will you?"

In a few minutes Harry Tootle, the town marshal, was lolling against the bootblack chair. After a time he came up the steps with an effort at casualness, and after a decent interval went to R. L. Arnhalt's office. If he could work this up it would be quite a feather in his cap.

The feather was his, for a few days later Guy was arrested.

CHAPTER XVI

THE day Guy was led from the drug store, under arrest, Adrian Plummer was in the barn, sitting in the buggy seat, staring at the cobwebby wall. For hours he would sit thus, sometimes taking the whip from the socket and striking at an imaginary horse between the shafts. After a time he would get down, go slowly around the buggy, shaking the wheels and tightening the nut heads. Then he would climb the ladder to the haymow, gather up a handful of hay and sniff it for must; turn over a mouse's nest with his foot; and then slowly back down the ladder. Going into his study, he would open his Bible and his thick finger would start to move across a page; it would stop, and soon he would be gazing with fixed, staring eyes at the wall.

"Pa, dinner is ready." Mrs. Plummer's face would appear in the door.

Going to the sink, he would wash up and then go in to the table.

A car drove up before the house and stopped; a step sounded on the porch.

"Guy's been arrested," said Harlan Thompson, and after a rehearsal of the details sped excitedly away. It was a big morning for Harlan.

Adrian Plummer's face hardened. He would see it through; it was revenge.

"I suppose we should have expected it," he said.

"It's their way of fighting. We won't hold back, Ma, on account of expense. We'll get him out if we have to tear down the jail. 'The Lord shall fight for you.'"

He began to have new life; he no longer sat in the buggy, flapping the whip over the haunches of an imaginary horse. Now there was something to live for.

"If they want to arrest anybody, why don't they arrest me?" he said, with his old fierceness. "Why don't they go to the bottom of things? I am the one that started it. They shall not trump up this on him."

He went to M. J. Stickel, the attorney. He would pay whatever was asked. It was no time to quibble. At last Stickel accepted and a study of the case was undertaken. Plummer helped, plunging into it with all the fierceness with which he prepared a sermon. He who had held his son up to the public so shamelessly, so heartlessly for his guilt, was now just as quick to defend him. Right was right, wrong was wrong; there was no halfway.

In his own words, he buckled on the armor of the Lord.

"Ma," he said, going back over the case, "I have found that the night they say Guy robbed the store was prayer-meeting night and he couldn't go because he had to work in the store. Don't you remember, we talked about it at supper?"

He was jubilant and went to Stickel with the information, and as they developed the case the information became more and more important. Possibly the case might turn on it. Plummer himself

was to go on the stand; he looked forward joyously to the prospect of clearing his son.

"When he isn't guilty he'll find that I'll stand by him to the last ditch."

Plummer, with his attorney, went to Wolf. He would make the evidence conclusive; clear up the last lingering doubt; put Wolf himself on the stand.

"Ledt me see," said Wolf. "I remember vell der robbery. I vill look on mein liddle yellow book und die prescriptions see. I vill know if I am here or avay. It will show by der handt who write it."

The rustle of the pages of the yellow ledger could be heard. He came waddling out.

"Yess, eet iss like I t'ink. I am here alone mit myself. I show you in der book mit der writing."

Plummer walked out numbly. His son had told a lie. His Guy!

"If he is guilty he must suffer," he said, and his face became set and hardened.

Lawyer Stickel was more optimistic. "There may be other explanations, Mr. Plummer. The prosecution may not put Wolf on the stand and I will not call on you. You must remember the burden of proof is on the state."

He made the case quite bright.

"No, if he has committed a wrong he must pay the penalty. I will tell them myself."

Plummer's lips closed and he clutched his great, bony hands. He was determined. He began to walk up and down the floor of the lawyer's office. Why would his son do such a thing? He had some money. Why should he steal more? Going to the window,

he looked out across the Square; his eye came to the window of Chew's office.

"O Lord, my blinded eyes see! On the daughter of an infidel." He sat down weakly and stared at the floor; at last he got up and moved out with uncertain step.

Hardly had the clanking and heavily barred door of the jail turned on Guy, the day of his arrest, before the news was over town. A procession of small boys, awed and silent, had followed him to the grim, red-brick building set back from the street; when the door had turned on its hinges they had looked at one another a moment estimatingly, then smiled. Before they got back to the Square they were laughing.

Tongues began to wag fast and furious. There was Mrs. Gropper's, for instance. Twenty-four dollars for a box. Of course he wanted money. Who wouldn't? Naturally. She had said to Mrs. Weaver that night at the church that Guy Plummer was stepping too high. Oh, there were plenty of ways for a young man to get rid of that much money if he had a wild streak in him! He ought to be thankful if he got off merely with a jail sentence.

There was some talk of assaulting the jail, getting Guy out, and giving him a coat of tar and feathers. In the old days he'd 'a' had it long before this; they mumbled on.

Guy sat on the edge of his iron cot and looked at the dull grimness of the walls. For greater space the cot during the day could be pushed up against the wall, but, as there was no chair, he sat on it with his head in his hands. On the wall were endless initials,

crude, nauseating drawings, pictures of naked women, vulgar poetry. Almost at the ceiling some unknown had cut his initials in the wall. How many men must have gone through this gray cell! In the one next to him a card game was going on, oaths rising as the men slapped the cards on the worn cement floor. By pressing his face against the bars of his cell he could see the men squatting on the floor over the greasy cards. One was in a red undershirt, his face covered with a ragged growth of beard. His jaw was rising and falling rhythmically, and from time to time he turned to discharge the black contents into the corner. . . .

The door clanked; there was the sound of thick, heavy bolts being withdrawn and four prisoners—dirty, smelling, reeking with perspiration—came in. They had been working on the "rock pile"—breaking rock as foundation for more vitrified brick. The dust clung to their eyebrows and was in their nostrils; they went shuffling up to a long trough and began washing, blowing through their noses like animals and swearing thickly as the soap slipped from their hands.

"How's God's beautiful outdoors?" asked one of the men in the card game. It was the customary joke. The four men went on snorting and blowing—a disgusting scene.

The day for the trial arrived.

The jury was now selected—twelve solemn and sedate men still picking their teeth at the expense of the county. Guy watched the foreman sink into his seat and hook his hands contently over his stomach.

Junction City was to have its revenge. Here was

something it could set its teeth into. After all, there was such a thing as retribution. The laws of nature were immutable. The town took a great deal of satisfaction in thinking about it.

There was little evidence against Guy; it was circumstantial, the piecing together of stray bits; but the right kind of jury would make it hot for him—would put him in his place, they said. He had been strutting the streets and boldly flaunting himself long enough. . . . With eager and delicious expectation the town prepared for the trial.

The shabby court room was crowded; steeply the pine seats rose, tier above tier. The brass chandelier hanging from the ceiling was covered with mosquito netting; along the walls were pictures of former members of the supreme bench, with now and then the picture of a local retiring judge.

One of the eager spectators was Cod Dugan. Cod had come early and secured one of the best seats. His wife had to stay at home and look after the children.

"I guess they got the goods on him, all right," he whispered to one of his cronies. "Stealin's a mighty serious thing."

The chorus came in from the bank steps—there was now hardly a soul on that sunny corner to make comments on those who passed. It took something important to clear that favorite spot.

The chorus:

"*He sure stepped high as a frozen-legged rooster till they got him.*"

"*I guess he's goin' to find the ramrod in his back ain't going to be so stiff.*"

"He thought what he didn't know could be wrote on the back of a postage stamp."

"Yeh, but I've noticed them know-alls sooner or later gets it where the chicken got the ax."

"I said more 'n a year ago that he wasn't spending all his time debating."

"And think of him helpin' run them 'Gay Hottentot' actresses out of town—and comin' back and looking as serious as Saint Peter!"

The chorus cackled and he-ha-ed and wiped their mouths on the backs of their hands.

With a strange feeling of numbness Guy sat looking at the twelve noble peers resting so contentedly in their reserved seats. Was it possible that these men whom he didn't know, and some of whom he had never seen before, were to change the course of his life? What a strange thing life was—to be whisked about by people you didn't know, by people who popped into and out of your life.

How uncertain was life's course! Whoever, a year ago, would have imagined that he would be inside a railing facing a jury, with curious faces banked row upon row staring impersonally down upon him. Once life had seemed to lie so straight before him; then suddenly it had gone off obliquely —"catty-cornered," as it was pronounced in Junction City. He kept repeating the phrase over and over, "Catty-cornered, catty-cornered."

Were other lives that way? Did other people start off so hopefully, with life seeming so easy and certain before them, for it to run off unexpectedly? Was he living over an old, old story? It might not

be a trial, a public scandal . . . It might be any one of a thousand things.

H. A. Hoggerly, the new prosecuting attorney—a tall, thin-faced man with great horn-rim glasses—scratched among his papers like a sharp-beaked bird of prey among the litter in its cage. He would show the people that they had elected the right man.

Clutching the papers in his claw, Hoggerly sidled up to the jury.

"Gentlemen, in opening a case it is accepted procedure for the prosecution to state what it expects to do, the points it expects to establish, the evidence it hopes to sustain, and it is your function in the operation of the legal machine to determine if such has been complete. In the case of the People *vs.* Guy Talmage Plummer we expect to establish that the defendant bore no good will toward the plaintiff; in fact, that a feeling of bitterness and jealousy had been extant between the two for some time, that the defendant entered the commission house conducted by the plaintiff at 322 North State Street, effecting entrance by prying open or 'jimmying' the door, that he lit his path by means of a candle, that he was observed coming up the alley, and that he is eminently deserving of the severest punishment prescribed by the law. Call Mrs. Sarah Gropper."

Then the judge warned them not to let anything outside the facts and evidence of the case influence them in the slightest.

"Mrs. Gropper," asked Hoggerly after the lady had taken her place, "were you at a so-called 'box social' at the Calvary Church of this city?"

"Yes, sir, I was there. I helped get it up."

"Can you state whether the defendant was there on that occasion?"

"Yes, he was there."

"Was there a box auctioned off on that occasion which brought a rather high figure?"

"Bee Chew's did."

"Tell us about it, please."

Mrs. Gropper did; it was a rare occasion and she made the most of it. In fact, spread herself. Had she attended many box socials in her life? Yes, lots of them. Had she ever heard of a box selling for twenty-four dollars? No, indeed, she hadn't; never. It was perfectly outrageous and she had said so at the time to Mrs. Weaver, who was sitting next to her. Who had been the principal bidder against the defendant? Why, Ed Hoecker! Had the occasion been one such as to engender pleasant feelings between the defendant and plaintiff? Well, she wouldn't want anybody to try to engender pleasant feelings that way with her.

"Thank you, Mrs. Gropper. That will be all."

The trial moved along. The prosecuting attorney scratched among his papers. Things were coming splendidly.

"Call Mr. R. L. Arnhalt."

Arnhalt slipped into the witness chair and fitted the glasses on his thin nose.

"Tell us," said Hoggerly after the preliminary questions, "if the defendant ever came to you to borrow money."

Yes, the defendant had. Three hundred dollars. No, he had not let him have it. Yes, just a day or two before the robbery.

The loungers moved with eager anticipation. They hadn't known about this. They looked at one another and winked confident eyes.

"Tell us of your movements on this evening in regard to the defendant."

Arnhalt had been going home from his office and when passing down Juniper Street had met the defendant at the head of the alley. Yes, coming up the alley. Yes, from the direction of the commission house.

"Was there any special reason why you should remember the occasion with clarity, Mr. Arnhalt? In other words, did you have conversation with the defendant?"

Arnhalt edged forward in his chair. Yes, he had had quite a little talk with the defendant. They had discussed the weather, also the poor lighting of the streets and the taxes.

"Have you been on pleasant terms with the defendant?"

"Yes."

"Are you so at the present?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you, Mr. Arnhalt. You may step down."

The prosecuting attorney scratched among his papers. It was a most satisfying case.

The trial proceeded. The prosecuting attorney raked the past, brought up everything. Bit by bit he began to show the jury that Guy was a person with a doubtful past—with veiled allusions to fatherless children—that he spent money recklessly, that he had disliked the plaintiff, Mr. Hoecker, in fact, was in a thoroughly antagonistic mind toward him. He

traced Guy's steps during the day, reminded them that Guy had been seen coming out of the alley a few yards from the door—with the lock now broken—and, standing a short distance from the scene of the robbery, had had a conversation with one of the most eminent and respected citizens in Junction City.

There was the matter of public opinion. In Junction City public opinion and not the law tried the case. Hoggerly had only to feed it. The jury would bring back the verdict which the community reflected. He had seen public opinion thus expressed too many times not to trust his case to it.

At last the jury filed out and after a time came back, while Guy gazed at them as if in a dream. The clerk of the court, his nose buried in a book, was singing out their names, while the audience stirred. The big moment had come. The twelve peers stood up and dimly Guy watched the foreman. The gentleman shook out his trouser's leg.

"Defendant, arise."

"Gentlemen, what is your verdict?"

"Guilty."

A moment's intense silence; the floor seemed to sway curiously. There was a shuffling over the audience, a slight, indistinct movement, a gasp. After all, it wasn't much—the people were so far away Only it seemed queer . . . the floor rose again.

"Gentlemen of the jury, checks will be mailed to you in the course of ten days or two weeks." The clerk began writing in his huge book calmly. The time to fix it up was now and get it off his mind.

"This way out," said the sheriff, and elbowed Guy hastily through a side door.

A few days later the judge pronounced sentence. It was for sixty days, and almost immediately Guy was put on the "rock pile."

He was soon "broken in."

"Come on, you rummies," said the guard, and the heavy bolt of the door clanked. The men were the coarse, brutish ones who had been playing cards—now increased by two negroes. The foul, ill-smelling crew shuffled into the middle of the street, while the guard, a rifle in the hollow of his arm, moved along behind them, pleasantly humming.

Some boys fell in, marching in awed silence, from time to time turning to whisper some discovery. Others came to join the circus and, no longer finding it necessary to communicate with each other by winks and nods and looks, openly began talking; began to call to Guy. "Hello there! Hello!" They grew bolder. "How do you like it, Guy?" "Free board." "Say, give me a pill." "How do you like the rock business?" There was no end to their wit; the guard enjoyed it, too, as he released his cigarette smoke.

Mrs. J. Myron Seevers in her car with two members of the Cultura Club passed on their way to a meeting. Often they had seen unknown men working on the street, but always had they passed hurriedly. Mrs. Seevers did not wish to come in contact with such unpleasant sights. They merely distressed one, did they not? and gave unpleasantness when there were so many bright, cheerful things in the world to see. Now she stopped her car.

Guy was seated on a folded gunny sack, monotonously hammering; particles of broken rock and dust

flew and as each time his hammer struck he winked. His eyelids were coated, his face and hands were covered with the gray mixture. Perspiration had streamed through it and in wiping it away he left unsightly smears on his face. A wheelbarrow came creaking and whining up, propelled by an illiterate, tobacco-dribbling negro; his shirt was unbuttoned, exposing a scrawny breast covered with the same gray dust—a horrible sight. At Guy's feet he dumped the rocks, while a cloud of dust rose; turning in the handles, he went slouching off on his return trip, dragging the screeching barrow after him.

Mrs. J. Mryon Seevers gazed with satisfaction on the scene. Her fingers opened. That Plummer man hadn't got any more than he deserved—shame on him. Mrs. Seever's lips fairly curled. It would be a lesson to the whole community. If a few cases were dealt with in this way such dreadful, unspeakable crimes would be stamped out. It just showed what a group of fearless, determined ladies could do. The members of Cultura might well be proud of themselves, might they not? . . . Mrs. Seevers drove off with satisfaction's soft, ennobling glow.

The sidewalk loafers found it a constant source of pleasure to watch Guy in his humiliation. Once Guy had seemed so far above them; theirs was the pleasure of the downfall of a superior. They found it convenient to loaf in the shady places, to sit in their rickety express wagons as they watched the street gang. They practiced their wit; they offered Guy chews of tobacco and when he refused their stained teeth leaped into view and they snorted their pleasure. Children on the way home from school

looked at him curiously; farmers driving in from the country commented on him as if he were an animal in a zoo displayed for their satisfaction. He was a tough-looking customer—there was no doubt about that. He looked like the sort of fellow who would do such a thing. Considering everything, he had got off mighty light. He was surly, you could see that . . . Cluck . . . cluck. They moved on. It was almost as good as a show.

As the weeks went by Guy became less and less a curiosity. The nine days' wonder had run its course.

At first he had rebelled bitterly. The whole world had seemed against him. He had hated the cold and impersonal judge, the contented jury, Hoggerly scratching among his papers. If he could only fly upon Hoggerly, seize his beak, and wrench it from his face. He gripped his fingers as he thought of that all-satisfying pleasure. The world was in a monstrous combine; but he would show it, bitterly make it repent the day it had conspired against him. Oh, he was lofty! He hated the people who gathered on the streets to stare; hated them through and through. He was as far above the gawks staring at him as Pike's Peak was above—he tried to think of some lesser neighboring mountain; then had doubts as to Pike's Peak's uncontested eminence. Anyway he knew what he meant; he would be a mountain among molehills.

However, as the days dragged by, bitterness was succeeded by hopelessness. His life had been ruined. Give a dog a bad name —— Now there was no use trying. It was good to have an excuse; something outside of himself that he could blame. There

was satisfaction in thinking that if the cards hadn't been stacked against him he could have risen high. There was a sad glory about it; something akin to Napoleon at St. Helena. How different things might have been if —— Life seemed to smother one so. Often he had had dreams at night of mountains of feather beds tumbling down on him and the futility of the small kicks he could give. So now he thought of life.

And then Hope, ever so green and sweetly beckoning, ran ahead of him. Other men had had their setbacks. Hadn't Lincoln lost the first office he ever ran for? Hadn't Roosevelt had bad health? He would show them; he clenched his fists and gritted his teeth. He was a fighter.

> It's nothing against you to fall down flat,
> But to lie there—that's disgrace!

He would bounce higher than ever, come up with a smiling face. He would get Bee, marry her, and they would go away and start all over again. She would be a wonderful wife. He thrilled as he thought of it. How he would love her; how he would keep her in his arms, make her sit in his lap, run his hands through her hair, pinch her dainty ears. The picture brought a warm, stirring feeling. How sweet she had been that day bending over the wicker crib. He kept telling himself that. He had always read it; had seen so many poems about it—the glory of motherhood. It was a great and wonderful thing—and then he wondered if it was. What about the baby squawking all times of the night? Cutting teeth? They bellowed then! Drying things? Run-

ning up doctors' bills? . . . He felt ashamed of himself. Why did he think of all these things when he was the one who got her into trouble? How she would spurn him if—like the Chautauqua lecturer had said—his thoughts were suddenly frozen and the top of his head miraculously sawed off? . . . Well, hereafter he wouldn't let himself think anything but wonderful thoughts of her. She would be his inspiration, his wonder girl; he would live for her. His state of excitement mounted. The moment he was free he would rush to her with his wonderful plans. At once they would get married, move away to some big city, and start in anew. Junction City was too small and crummy, anyway. Chicago! that was more like it. Then they wouldn't have to be eternally thinking about their neighbors—the damned, nosey, good-for-nothing neighbors. He could hardly wait till the last day of his sentence, but when he rushed to the house to tell Bee his wondrous plans there was no response to his knock. After a time the maid came. Bee had left town a few days before with the baby. There was no address; the maid closed the door.

CHAPTER XVII

AT first, Bee had fought back, had faced the community defiantly. Her independent spirit had risen, reinforced by the liberal views of her father. She had done no wrong except obey the deepest impulse imbedded in her, so why should she hide herself away? she asked herself. Why should she creep around like some guilty animal? And so Bee had walked the streets of Junction City openly, fearlessly had looked people in the eyes. Instead of keeping behind screened blinds she had gone out more than before. No scarlet letter for her. She sat with Cecil in the yard, wheeled him into the street, called attention to him.

Soon, however, she began to feel the weight of the community. No longer was she invited to parties, her old friends found excuses to avoid her; if, on some pretext, she stopped them they must hurry on. The house in which she lived became a matter of curiosity. People stopped to stare at it; she could see the farmers in their wagons craning their necks. When she went to the store, the clerks in waiting on her dropped their voices, went out of their way to be "nice" to her. After she had gone, she could see them bunching together.

Her love for her child grew. She was confident that Guy did not care for the child, that he was ashamed of it. When he had come to see her, she

had hung on every word he had said about the child; it seemed to her that he ought to bow down in worship before the wonderful creature, but instead he was most casual with it. She could feel that he was making himself take an interest in it. She was not to be misled. She thought, after the great price she had paid, that Guy should worship Cecil. She had always heard of the "proud father," but there was none of it in Guy. After the first curious inspection of the infant he had remained impersonal and aloof. The child meant nothing to him. His only interest was one of curiosity—a constant going over in his mind how all this had happened. There was no parental feeling. Bee came to look upon herself as Cecil's only friend, and as a result she loved her child even more fiercely.

Try as he would, Chew, in his personal relations with his daughter, could not disguise the fact that he was hurt. When the supreme moment had come Bee had not turned to him. She had taken the matter into her own hands; he was no longer in her confidence. Chew began to take less interest in his work; when committees came for speeches and opening addresses he had previous engagements. He began to brood. After all, was his theory of life the right one? He had looked upon life so confidently, with such steadfast certainty had instilled free beliefs into the mind of his daughter, and now. . . . It was bitter. He had sown the seed and now the fruit was before him. He began to arrive at the office late; at trials he would come in with important papers missing and would have to ask the judge to excuse him until he could return to his office.

At first, Bee and her father had kept up an elaborate fiction that all was well. They had pretended to overlook the seriousness of it. But Chew could not disguise from Bee the effects of the blow. The air of good fellowship in which always they had moved was theirs no more. Constraint began to grow up.

At first Bee had taken Cecil out in the front yard, leaving the carriage boldly on view, but people had stopped in front to whisper. At last she had found it easier to keep him in the rear in his baby buggy. But even here children soon found him and, coming to the back fence, whispered together; sometimes they tiptoed to the carriage and, lifting up the covers, gazed at him in awed silence. At last Bee left him in his room and opened the windows.

Bee began to see more plainly what it would mean to bring up Cecil in Junction City. He would never receive fair treatment; he would always be an outcast. The stigma would go with him through life. Cecil was now her first interest; no sacrifice was too great—and so quietly she disappeared.

Vague rumors had come back as to where she was: Kansas City, California, one of the Minnesota lakes. People returning from everywhere thought they had seen her; several of them had spoken to her—later to find that they had spoken to her on practically the same day in widely separated localities. Rumors of suicide, of parts of clothing coming back—and then even the nosiest had settled down to acceptance of the fact that nothing was known of her.

Bee's disappearance was complete.

After the shock of finding Bee gone, Guy went

down the street with a depressed, despondent feeling. Time after time he had gone over in his mind just what he was going to say, the precious things he was going to whisper in her ears, and now she was gone. Again life had gone off at an unexpected angle—"catty-cornered." Was life so?—a constant building up of air castles and a ruthless tearing down?

But during the long days on the rock pile he had had time to think. The first flush of youth was now behind him. His steel was coming out. Things were not clear, but there was more to life than the Pastime Pool Hall. He had touched bedrock and now was beginning to build.

His father was waiting for him on the porch in his rusty black. In it he could see the compromise his father had made. Guy had done a great wrong in stealing—in his father's stern tenets there was no excuse for stealing—but his father had dressed in his formal clothes for his home-coming. He was standing in the same place on the porch he had stood when so remorselessly he had uncovered his past, but now there was no heroic mold—no longer was he moved by the power of a great decision. He now seemed an older and more worn man. Streaks of gray were coming into his side whiskers, the stoop to his shoulders was more pronounced; but he was eagerly waiting Guy's arrival. He had carefully pared his finger nails with his heavy clasp knife, had rearranged the papers in the sitting room. Once he had kept his religious journals in a neat pile on the shelf under the center table, but now they were gone. On the wall had been a brilliantly colored Church calendar published each year by a Bible-

supply house, with quotations and golden texts for each day, but now it was gone. Its place was now filled by one sent by the Dry Goods Emporium.

Guy came up the walk to the house. "Well, pa, I'm back," he said, with an attempt at lightness, but prepared to be on the defensive.

But there was no need of that; his father was childishly eager to see him. However, Adrian Plummer could not show it. He had lived too long a life of suppression for any outward sign.

"So I see," he said. "Well, come in."

They shook hands quickly, both embarrassed.

Mrs. Plummer came lumbering out and seized Guy to her great bosom.

"Oh, Guy! Oh, Guy!" she breathed. "You poor innocent lamb! Kiss your poor old mamma."

She patted him, half crying, half laughing.

"Come in to supper," said Mrs. Plummer, at last. "I wanted to get dressed up to meet you, but there is so much work to do in this house and nobody to help me"—she glanced significantly at Plummer—"that I just couldn't make it. O Lord! O Lord! sometimes I don't know how I can bear it."

She led the way to the supper table. Guy took his accustomed place and bowed his head. But his father didn't say his long and fervent grace. In a moment it was over.

Adrian Plummer wanted to talk to his son, but Mrs. Plummer silenced him, interrupted him, rattled on. She dominated him, covertly threw it up to Plummer that her life had been ruined, and then rushed on before he could formulate a sentence. Plummer gave up trying to talk—he would "visit"

with Guy after supper. At last Plummer arose and with a quick movement swept the crumbs from his lap into his plate, as his habit was.

But Mrs. Plummer was ahead of him. "Come on out to the kitchen and talk with your old mother," she said.

She rattled on: she had everything to do by herself; she was becoming more "crippled up" all the time; it hurt her to be "on" her feet so much; nobody any more ever came to see her; once she had been respected—nobody was "better thought of"—and now—"O Lord! O Lord!" she sighed. She made a helpless gesture toward the sitting room. "Your father. I suppose he means well."

Adrian Plummer went out to bed down Prince for the night. He never grew tired working with Prince. He curried him, rubbed him, bought oily foods to make his coat glisten. Now he went carefully over the litter that he spread in the stall to make certain that there were no cob ends in it, nothing to make his favorite uncomfortable.

Mrs. Plummer saw him. "There he is out there fussing around with that horse. Yesterday he went down and got another bag of that oil meal when I haven't got decent shoes to my feet." She displayed her run-over shoes triumphantly. "He never gets any funerals or anything any more. O Lord! I don't know what's going to become of us."

She continued; and so it was day after day.

Guy started out to look for something to do. Sometimes he wanted to run away, go where he wasn't known, start over. That would be easiest.

And then he gritted his teeth. No! he would stay and fight it out in Junction City. He had decided that on the rock pile. He had just begun to fight; his head was bloody, but unbowed; he would bounce up higher than ever. . . . But he did not know the power of a community

He tried to get a job, but there was none. No one wanted a "jail bird"; it would "hurt business." From place to place he had gone, but, unfortunately there was no opening for him; not making any changes just now; and then they had hurried him out on to the street. At last he got a job at the Burlington railroad station wheeling trunks, chicken coops, and milk cans—the railroad didn't care what kind of help it had just so the things got on the train. But it did not last—the wife of the station agent was anxious to "get acquainted," wanted to meet some "nice people," and she had come to Mrs. Myron J. Seevers. A few days later Guy had been notified that as his position had been only temporary, another man—more familiar with railroading—was to be put in. Guy had then found a position working on the Normal grounds, setting out trees, plowing the experimental gardens for the agricultural students, keeping the weeds down and things in shape generally. They had not had a good man since Mose Ningly, an old negro, had grown tired of having so many bosses and had thrown up his job. But soon the president of the Normal found that it was a bad example to have a person like Guy constantly before the students—all so young and in the formative period—and had put a note in the box where Guy was accustomed to go for his orders.

Finally Guy had found a place with the water-works company, in the pumping house down by the Hundred and Two River. There, in overalls and with a wrench in a loop on the back of his trousers, he had worked, with the pumps hissing monotonously, sending the water on its way to the water tower, high on its steel stilts, where it was conveyed over town. The pump superintendent, with his face blackened and smeared, his shirt gaping and a corncob pipe in his mouth, sitting on a rough chair he had converted from a packing case, welcomed his helper to his lonely post and again got out his checkerboard; and then came word from the city engineer, who was up for re-election, that he would have to get another man. The end of the week closed the arrangement.

Thus things went. At last Guy found a position in the office of the Poland China Association and here he now was. His duty was to keep records of the pedigreed hogs. All day he sat in the office entering boars and brood sows in a long book, checking off numbers, and sending out certificates to proud owners, supplying blue ribbons for fairs. The officers of the association were scattered over three states and were difficult to reach. The local manager didn't like the town, anyway. Let 'em howl. And so Guy continued at his post.

They hadn't been able to drive him out of town, but the pressure of the community was beginning to make itself felt. He walked the streets less boldly; his long, loose-jointed stride was not so confident. Most of the time he managed to keep out of sight, going directly from his father's house to his office,

walking on the east side of the Square, where there where fewer people than on the west side.

This is the way the people looked at him:

He wasn't so brash as he used to be. Used to strut around like a peacock, but he wasn't holding up his head so high now. It was kind of getting under his hide. It was time his likes found out they couldn't get away with it.

Sometimes you'd see him at the Carnegie Free Library, back among the bookshelves, so quiet you wouldn't know he was there till plop! you'd bump into him and give yourself a terrible start. Or maybe you'd see him going out for a walk, flopping his arms like he always did, going down lanes and through pastures where he wouldn't be in any danger of meeting anybody; gettin' terrible skittish, he was. Or maybe sitting on a railroad trestle with his legs hanging over, looking down at the scummy creek with the crawfish backing out of their holes, maybe tryin' to spit on 'em. Once or twice a train had pretty near caught him; at the last moment he had got down and clung to one of the crossbeams. Sometimes he'd turn loose and sing like all-get-out, when he couldn't carry a note if he had it in a gunny sack. Sometimes in his walks he'd come upon a farmer cutting a hedge or mowing a fence row and the farmer would try to get him started talking, but he wouldn't talk any more than a wooden Indian—just sidle off maybe with a grunt or two. He was queer that way. He'd stop to talk to any kid that came along, but when a grown person who really had something to say came up he would beat it off.

There was an abandoned race track southeast of town; once it had been popular and the scene of

much revelry and excitement—and then a new law had come along. Weeds were now growing up in the track where once horses from many states had whirled down the home stretch; the stables and paddocks now had a foul, unearthly smell, with great green flies buzzing in the unnatural stillness. Long-whiskered rats suddenly popped out to look at one; there would be a scurry, a rattle of boards, and they were gone. Boys had broken the window lights and written coarse lines on the walls. It was a gloomy, dismal place.

The town:

Sure, you could always see him hanging around the old race track—last place in the world anybody with any gumption'd want to be. But he seemed to like it—rats, flies, and all. Sometimes through one of the broken boards you could see him sprawled out on the grass reading, or throwing at a beer bottle on a post. Crash! would go the bottle and then he'd mosey on to something else—maybe on the rattletrap judges' stand—and begin to spout oratory. But the moment anybody came he'd shut up like a clam. If you came in on one side of the track he'd maunder off on the other, never opening his mouth, and if you followed him he'd ease through some hole and amble off down to the river and maybe sit there for a couple of hours, staring at the water, once in a while throwing a clod among the water bugs just to see 'em jump. Miss meals, stay out half the night, moon around—any old thing. He didn't care. Didn't have more 'n a couple of friends in town, maybe not that many. It'd show young fellers they couldn't kick out of the traces and expect to get away with it.

Thus the months had dragged by; the years.

Everyone was afraid to make the first advance. It would make people talk; that awful, fearful, contaminating thing! One must go with the crowd; do that which was being done; shun or be shunned.

And then Miss Dessie Arnhalt found it convenient to walk on the east side of the Square; to stop and gaze with sudden interest in cloudy lumber-yard windows. At first Guy had stared straight ahead, his unblinking eyes fastened on some remote spot on the horizon; and then Dessie had spoken to him openly. He had taken off his hat in surprised awkwardness, but had hurried on. A few days later he chanced to meet her again, this time on a side street, and she had spoken to him again.

"I wonder if you could mail this letter," she said, and showed him the missive, "to get it off on the 6.10. Mamma isn't feeling very well and I'm awfully anxious to get it off."

Guy looked at the clock on the courthouse.

"I'm afraid the mail's closed now."

"Do you think so, so soon? I had no idea they closed so early."

"I can run with it to the train and give it to the mail clerk."

He seized the letter and bounded off. When she saw him again she was most appreciative. It was necessary to discuss the matter for several moments.

"I'll tell you what it was now"—she lowered her eyes modestly—"if you promise not to laugh. You men always make so much fun of us girls. It was for my dress. Don't you want to see it?"

"Do—do you really mean it?"

It was pleasant to have somebody speak to him,

to stand openly on the street talking to him. As she began to describe the dress he felt a glow of pleasure. She *would* look good in her new dress. When they parted he went away with quickened feeling. He must think up something nice to say about the dress.

When he saw it he quite arose to the occasion. Dessie *was* a nice girl—a nice, honest, truthful, dependable girl. She was the first person in town to treat him as a human being; he must never forget that.

Dessie went to Des Moines to a Missouri Valley meeting of the Christian Endeavor. She had been chosen by the church, and joyfully, excitedly went to the great event.

When she returned she called Guy up.

"Guy, don't you want to come over this evening? I have to make a report of the meeting to the church and I thought you could listen to my 'oration.'" She laughed politely at the exaggeration. "You know, you were always so good at speaking."

Guy had gone and been of great help to her. She had said so many times. She saw to it that others talked to him; at first a bit uneasily, then more openly. She introduced him adroitly into conversations, subtly pointed out his merits. And then one day Guy appeared at church—the first time since his arrest. The members must exercise the Christian spirit—in the church.

But Dessie was getting on—she was five years older than Guy.

CHAPTER XVIII

FIVE years had passed since Guy had completed his sentence on the rock pile. He was now twenty-five years old.

Junction City was having its annual "county fair," and with Dessie at his side Guy was moving among the people, enjoying it. The streets had been roped off against the passing of vehicles and now were filled with booths, lemonade stands, candy stalls, and ice-cream counters decorated with yards of gayly colored cheesecloth. On exhibit were jellies, cakes, preserves, canned peaches, and so on entered by the women of the county; in a long, smelly building covered with tar paper and set off with flags were prize chickens, turkeys, pigeons, guineas, while at a more discreet distance was the building devoted to thoroughbred hogs, cattle, sheep, calves, colts, brood mares, stallions, and mules. On a few of the pens were blue ribbons, while the proud farmers whose stock had won managed to keep near.

The side shows were in full blast—snake eaters, fat women, Texas giants, sword swallowers, tattooed men, and one horrible creature who five or six times an evening thrust pins—hat pins, safety pins, anything—through his skin, and then when it was over sank down contentedly on the small of his back in a folding chair and promptly lost himself in a paper-covered novel.

It was Saturday evening—the biggest evening of the fair—and all were in a properly receptive mood. The four streets surrounding "the Square" were filled with people. They were throwing rings at cane racks for cheap prizes; blowing squawkers in one another's faces; emitting horrible noises; throwing confetti; flourishing feather dusters; whirling noise-making contrivances. A band was playing; a "black-face" comedian was strumming a banjo and telling funny stories; a calliope was soon to make a triumphal tour of the Square.

The week had been a big success, and now in a blaze of glory it was being brought to a close. Sunday morning the revelers would sleep late, the stands would be deserted; Monday morning workmen hired by the Commercial Club would pull down the gay bunting—and Junction City's merrymaking would be over for another year.

To-night the prizes would be awarded—the awards being judiciously withheld till the last night. One of the prizes which had attracted much attention, and over which many jokes had been made, was the bean-guessing contest. In the window of one of the hardware stores was a great glass jar filled with beans of all colors and sizes—red beans, yellow beans, kidney beans, little black-eyed susans, limas; the merchant had spread himself in getting such an assortment. In the other window was the prize (if won by a woman)—a cook stove, resplendent in shining nickel, with patent foot strips for opening the oven door without stooping, baking thermometers, glass peepholes. It was a dazzling piece of hardware in comparison with the simple stoves in the county.

If the prize was won by a gentleman—the announcements always called the fortunate person a lady or a gentleman—it was to be a set of single-driving harness. All week people had flowed in, but now the books were closed; the judges were going over the guesses; soon the announcement would be made.

The intoxicating music of the band was pulsing through the streets, and with a quickened sense of pleasure Guy walked among the gay revelers with Dessie at his side. From time to time he turned to cast appraising glances at her. She had on a dress she had long planned for the occasion. After all, she had many good qualities, and in certain lights she was not so bad looking. Guy stopped to shower a passer-by with confetti; the other responded vigorously and in the spirited exchange Dessie laughed delightedly—until her mouth was filled with the dry material. Guy suggested that they stop in at one of the booths to get some lemonade "to wash it down," and led the way.

"Let's not stop there," said Dessie, as lightly she laid her hand on his arm. "It's run by Greeks. Let's go to the church booth."

She maneuvered him to the proper place.

After consuming the thin concoction they moved into the gay throng. Again the revelry began; it was pleasant to have such a companion. Guy's spirits rose. The swell of the band was pulsing through him; the spirit of revelry was upon him. He had put on a horrible false nose which gave him a ridiculous appearance.

"Oh, you look awful," said Dessie, "just perfectly awful! and you know you aren't like that at all."

The implied compliment was very pleasant.

Guy, in this ecstasy, mounted a box as a crowd gathered around him.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, imitating the singsong of the barker in front of the "human-pin-cushion" side show, "step inside and see Professor Tomato Ketchup thrust nails, needles, hatpins, hairpins, breastpins, safety pins, shucking pegs, darning needles, coupling pins—any old thing—through the living, breathing tissue of his flesh. It makes you creep, it makes you quiver, it makes your blood run cold. . . ."

He continued until deluged with confetti.

The old spirit of mock fun was upon him; for a few moments he quite forgot himself.

"That was good," said Dessie. "Oh, how I wish you could go on and do something big!"

She looked up at him; he swallowed and for a brief moment clutched at her hand.

"Maybe with you—" He hesitated, stumbled, and concluded, lamely, "I wish I could."

"I believe you can," she said, and returned the pressure of his hand.

He felt a glow—it was wonderful to be with such a girl. He began to look around for a chance for another imitation. But in a moment Dessie had him down the glittering and animated street. It was the people who counted.

She stopped at church booths, picked up conversations, suggested knickknacks that should be bought from certain bazaars, then adroitly brought Guy into the conversation.

She paused before the Cultura Club booth. "You

look tired, Mrs. Seevers," said Dessie; "you ought to sit down," and her eyes wandered to a folding chair. In a moment Guy was holding it invitingly for the lady, and with a pleasant nod the two passed on. Many people were spoken to . . . all were in gala mood. She maneuvered him, threading him in and out among the booths as a weaver does her shuttle; and Guy in thankful appreciation accepted, unseeing. She met the "right people," bought at the "proper" booths, managed to get a laugh and moved on.

The prize award for the guessing contest was to take place, and the people flowed to it in a good-natured, jesting, jostling mob. They pushed and shoved as they surrounded the store's booth where the announcement was to be made. The glass jar was put on exhibition and the mayor rose. Squawkers squawked, horns tooted and blared, handfuls of confetti were tossed into the air. At last the mayor was able to make himself heard. It was a good occasion to make a speech. Splendid public spirit . . . generous merchants . . . loyal citizens . . . trade at home . . . mail-order houses . . . wrecking the country. . . .

Guy could hardly believe his ears, and yet he knew that he had heard aright. His head buzzed deliciously; there was a pleasant ringing in his ears. Dessie's name had been read off. She had won the prize; she had guessed within two beans.

They tried to get her to come up on the platform; they pulled and hauled, horns howled, but the astonished Dessie would only shake her head. At last Guy stepped up and took the certificate of award for

her. For a breathless moment there was suspense, a quick weighing, and then a cheer. The crowd shoved and jostled in an effort to get to her for congratulations, and at last the two were brought together, and side by side received the felicitations.

In a delightful haze he walked home with her. It had been a wonderful evening. Again the world seemed so far away, so small and impersonal, as though seen through the wrong end of the telescope. It was the same feeling as of old; he had not had it for years. He had thought that it would never come back; now it had. It was pleasant to be master of the world. Why had he ever been afraid of people? Why had he shunned them? He turned to look at Dessie in the moonlight, moving along sedately at his side. It was wonderful to have such a pal. He squeezed her arm, and in a moment a soft, stimulating pressure came back. He turned to look at her again; she was better suited for his height than—well, than anybody. Such a thing seemed important.

They laughed a great deal about the cook stove.

"Wasn't it perfectly ridiculous, me getting it? What in the world would I want with a cook stove, of all things? Mamma wouldn't give up her Royal Buck for anything. I suppose I'll have to throw it away."

He was appalled at the idea.

"I wouldn't do that," he said.

"I suppose the Salvation Army would be glad to get it."

An idea came to him—appealing to some strange sense of economy. Why not? He tried to visualize

her moving about the stove, then dismissed it from his mind. It was just a passing fancy.

"Papa put up our new swing to-day," she indicated the red contrivance. "We'll watch the people go by. I like to sit and watch people when they can't see me. Don't you?" It seemed a splendid idea.

She got him into the swing.

"I think it's just wonderful the way you have stood—well, everything—what people have said and so on." She sighed as though a great wrong had been done. "You never talked back or anything—just went ahead. It takes a big soul to do that. They were just pygmies or dwarfs or something, and you—well, something away above them. You didn't run away or anything—just stayed here and made people respect you. Lots of people make mistakes and do things they shouldn't—only they never get found out." With feeling she announced her great discovery. "That's the reason I can admire anybody who can go through a thing like that and—well, get started again."

It was most agreeable to talk to such an appreciative person. He began to expand. His hopes and fears, buried so long, were coming up; a glow was rising; a new hope beckoning.

"I have been talking to Mr. Wolf and I think he'll take me back into the store." He confided his hopes.

Dessie was delighted; that would be perfectly splendid. But he wouldn't stop there—he would go on and on. . . .

Guy gazed across at Dessie. There was something to that girl. She *was* a pal. She made a person want

to do things. He wondered how he had gone all these years without realizing her worth. He could make out in the moonlight the red line of her lips. . . . She *did* have a slight mustache on her lip, but probably that could be removed. Anyway, now it couldn't be seen.

At last he must go. He was beginning to feel yawny.

"Good night. I must run along," he said. "Thank you for a pleasant evening." They shook hands perfunctorily; he said nothing of coming back.

"Don't dream about the cook stove," he said, with growing sleepiness, as they stood at the door.

They both laughed.

"Well, I must step," he said.

"Oh, by the way," she said, at the last moment, "our Sunday school is going to have a picnic next Saturday afternoon—all day. We are going out in the woods and gather flowers and then sit on the grass and have supper." She painted the joys of the bucolic occasion. "Don't you want to come and go along?"

"Why, yes, I'd like to. It's been a coon's age since I sat down on a plate of jelly."

He went off laughing. What a good time he'd had! He was getting to be more like himself, and as he went down the street he even began to whistle. The world was again rosy.

CHAPTER XIX

IT was a severe blow for Adrian Plummer when Guy went to the rock pile. His son stealing! The son he had guided so confidently into life. His own flesh and blood!

Adrian Plummer's spirit weakened; hope oozed away. The spirit which once had been so bright and flaming went around in a daze. He became silent and moody. Sometimes he got up in the morning and said hardly a word till noon. He appeared less and less in public; he stayed around the house. He went for long walks, streaking it along the side of the road, not lifting his eyes to the people. Sometimes he saw Guy in the old race track grounds; they managed not to meet.

The barn became his solace. He would hitch up Prince with the air of going somewhere and start briskly for the country. But there were no weddings, no more funerals, no more sick calls. After a time he would come in, his eyes glazed and fixed on a point between Prince's ears, dreaming. He began to sit in the barn; sometimes he curried Prince, sometimes washed the buggy, dusted the small foot-carpet. He thought the hay was getting too musty for Prince, that it was giving him the heaves. He carried water to the mow and threw it over the hay. It leaked through and came down on the top of the buggy. He flung open the doors and hurriedly backed the

rig out; let down the top and carefully wiped it with chamois cloth, then oiled it. It was something to do. He worked at his carpenter's bench. He liked to paint, and bought cans of it, spent hours mixing it with linseed oil; then he painted the buggy, taking endless pains with the red stripes.

He turned against God. The idea came on him like a slow-creeping shadow. He tried to shake it off, but it fastened on him anew. Was there a God? After all, was Chew right? He decided to find out. He went to the library and got out Darwin and Huxley and read them far into the night, his gray, shaggy head coming closer and closer to the books in his absorption. He swallowed heavily; his hands trembled. He flung the book from him; but he could not resist the temptation. He picked it up again and hunted out the page, the leaf scratching against his fingers. He read Paine's *The Age of Reason*. Going to the post office, he sent off a money order for Ingersoll's works. He liked the roll of the lines, the oratory; his lips framed the flowing lines. At the irony of it all a grim bitterness arose—his life had been devoted to praising and glorifying a Being who did not exist. Or so he thought.

A new preacher took his place at the church. One of the deacons sent a note to Plummer asking him if he would kindly return all church property; Plummer did not go inside.

An offer from a Chautauqua bureau came; he was to go out as "organizer"; in reality, to visit small towns and induce them to put in a "blanket program" by which one management would furnish all "talent." On opening days he delivered the wel-

coming address, introduced the first speaker—and then moved on to "organize" another town. The work took him away from Junction City; he met new people who knew nothing of his story. In his bag he carried his books; his books of investigation. In hotels, at railroad junctions, he read them. He tore long slips of paper to put between the pages until the books were aflutter. He picked up acquaintance with drummers, for he wished to have somebody to discuss things with; but they were not interested. Had he made Pattonsburg? What kind of meals was the place settin' now? It used to be rotten. . . . He read the books alone.

One day the bureau decided that they could no longer "use" him. Word had reached the president. Adrian Plummer went back to Junction City. At last he found a place traveling for a nursery. He drove Prince into another county and displayed his catalogue with its enticing illustrations. Then he learned that the nursery was a fraud; its stock existed principally in the magnificence of its illustrations. Again he returned to Junction City. He grew poorer. At last he decided to make the sacrifice—sell Prince. Saturday afternoon he led him to the auction yard back of the livery stable, where he went to the highest bidder. Silently he tied Prince to the end-gate rod of a farmer's wagon.

"Git-ap," said the farmer, and in astonishment Prince turned to look back at his master.

There was a stirring in Adrian Plummer's throat; a film came over his eyes. Quickly he felt in his pocket; one lump of sugar remained. Trotting along by Prince's side, he gave it to him, patted his nose,

then resolutely turned his back and began to whistle. After a long walk he returned home. But the money didn't last long. Soon he placed himself in the shafts of the buggy and ran it down to the auction yard. He didn't stay to see how much it brought. When the clerk of the sale turned over the small sum he accepted it without comment.

The barn was lonely. Prince was not there with a joyful whinny when he opened the door; there was no buggy seat to sit in. He sawed a barrel in two, leaving a high curving back. This he padded and fixed into a seat—it was something to keep him busy. Here he sat reading *The Descent of Man*, the letters of Alfred Henry Wallace. Suddenly he would get up and, going to his bench, furiously begin to work with his tools. But not for long; a few moments later he would be back to his sawed-barrel seat.

Mice began to make nests in the hay that was left. "I suppose I had just as well sell it," he said, and went down to the Square where the drivers of the express wagons loafed in the sun, waiting for their small jobs. He found one who was interested, but when he saw the man's pitiful, thin-ribbed horse he gave him the hay.

His clothes grew shabby; he rarely went downtown during the day; but when a trip was necessary his lips came together in their old grim line, his neck stiffened, his shoulders raised, and boldly he walked into the street.

"He still feels proud of himself," people said.

On the walls of the barn were canes, crutches, and the staffs of the people he had cured—a last reminder

of his days of power and strength. Constantly he kept them before him; in some curious way they seemed to link him with his past. Sitting in the sawed barrel he would look at them, sometimes get up and handle them, knock the dust off them, go over them with the chamois cloth left after the sale of the buggy. Sometimes his shoulders would rise and for a moment his strength would return. He would begin to harangue them; spout oratory; to deliver Ingersoll's liquid orations. Boys creeping up to the barn door found a great deal of enjoyment.

Mrs. Plummer began to find fault with him. Her day of disillusionment had come. No more could she look up to him. He had deceived her, when she had thought him so wonderful; he hadn't been half so splendid as her virginal self. Never had she done anything she shouldn't; never had she deceived, ruined. She found occasion, often, to fling it in his face. At first he had resented it, had fired up, but now he accepted it more calmly. She: *Look at what he had done! Spoiled everything. If he had kept his mouth shut nothing would have happened. He'd still be preaching at the church; nobody would know about Guy. The girl would have left town (she had, anyway); soon everything would have been forgotten. Look what a mess he had made of it—all because he had to spout off his mouth! What was he going to do about it? They had to eat. Why hadn't he held on to his jobs? Specially that nursery job—it paid the best of all. Did he expect his family to starve?*

She began coming out to the barn. Suddenly she would fling open the door and stand there with her hands defiantly on her spreading hips.

"Still settin', are you? Well, I've been on my feet all day. Got to, to get anything on the table."

She pounced on his crutches and canes. "Look here, why don't you cut up those old things for firewood? They ain't ever going to do anybody any good any more."

When she had gone he took them to the empty haymow and piled them in the corner. She would never find them; never be able to climb the ladder.

One day when he came back they were gone. Mrs. Plummer had sent a neighbor boy up the ladder; they were firewood.

She began to hound him to get a job. Whenever he came around her she was at him. "So that's the way you are looking for work, is it—settin' there on your sawed barrel. If I was a man I know I could find something to do. Oh, hummm!"

He took up less genteel work. He brought his early experience on the farm into use and found a place in a greenhouse, carrying sprinkling pots, pruning, weeding, pulling back sliding glass frames, regulating the heat; but one day he got into an argument with the owner about religion, and suddenly, bitterly, his old temper arose. He flared up. The owner got the best of the argument by firing him.

Mrs. Plummer was in a rage. "So that's the way you hold your jobs, is it? What you arguing about this time?" He told her that it was about religion. "That's what I thought. Trying to convert somebody to your way of thinking, like you always are, and then flyin' off the handle when they don't agree with you. A good one, you are, to talk religion—after all you've done."

His house now was splotched and stained. He began to paint it. He liked to see the surface slowly changing under his hand. When he finished it he walked around it with satisfaction. It was a neat job; he had done it well. While he was admiring it some one stopped and asked him if he wouldn't, as a special favor, paint his house, too. Plummer went—he would do just this one job. Earn a little money.

"Well, it's time you were getting something to do," said Mrs. Plummer when he gave her the money.

He had become a house painter.

One day, in getting a book on evolution out of the library, he found an envelope in it. It was Chew's. A quick pulse of rage shot over him and he started to tear it up.

"I suppose I had better return it," he said to himself, after a few moments, and went up the stairs to Chew's office to drop it in the letter box outside his door, but just at that moment the lawyer came out.

"I—I found your letter in this book," Plummer said, gruffly, and thrust it into his hand. Then he went down the hall. Chew stood looking at him; then recognized the heavy, colorless binding of the library book.

Now that life had come down heavily about him, Adrian Plummer began to yearn for his son. His heart went out to him, but he did not know how to approach him; something huge and insurmountable held him back; the chasm could not be crossed. He tried to find ways of reaching his son, but Guy, now long accustomed to keeping his own secrets, avoided him. Often he saw Guy walking

down the street, swinging along in his careless, disjointed stride, and hurried after him, but when Guy heard the quick steps he moved on hastily or suddenly found an excuse for a side path. And Mrs. Plummer gloated and threw out her poison. She had looked forward to big days in the city as the wife of the pastor of a flourishing church; and now . . .

"I wish you'd run out and bring me in a load of wood," she said to Guy. "Your father can set out there in the barn all day staring at the wall and never think how heavy I am getting on my feet. You look tired to-night, darling. Did you see Dessie to-day?"

Dessie was worth two of the Chew girl's kind. She would be a real help to him, send him up in the world. Her father was a deacon; a big spirited man.

Once Adrian Plummer had worked in the barn with the doors open, but now he kept them closed, with the dusty electric light turned on. At first he kept the paint buckets, linseed cans, and brushes off his neat carpenter's bench—he arranged a board on a barrel and placed them on it; but one by one they came over to the work table; he had thought that he would merely mix the linseed oil on it, but the cans had stayed. When the oil dripped on the bench he carefully wiped it up with wisps of hay, at first; but soon he was in a hurry. Buckets of white lead followed, jugs of priming oil, finishing brushes. One by one his carpenter tools were crowded down at one end of the bench; finally one day he gathered them up and put them in a box under the table. At first, when he began testing out his brushes he looked about for boards; then he began using the

wall; it became covered with homely, meaningless streaks and swabs. The barrel disappeared for firewood; ladders were brought in and propped against the wall; finally they were shoved down the length of Prince's stall; ropes and pulley blocks were hung on the harness arms; Plummer's specked and spotted work suit was flopped over the manger. The barn was now a paint shop.

He would work for hours at his paints, testing colors, softening his brushes in the turpentine can, without saying a word; no song arose. Abruptly, sometimes, in his work he would sit down on the sawed barrel and stare at the floor, or climb up in the haymow; after a time he would sigh heavily, wearily, and return to his work.

One day there was a rattle at the door; he jumped. It was Guy. His father looked at him hopefully. Had Guy sought him out for the pleasure of talking to him?

"Oh, I didn't know you were in here," said Guy, hastily.

"That's all right. Come in. I wasn't doing anything much—just fussing around. You know how an old man is," he said, humorously, but with the manner of expecting Guy to deny his age. Guy said nothing. "More fussing than work, I expect," he added.

"I want to fix my racquet."

Under Dessie's manipulation Guy had been asked to join a newly organized tennis club where the "right people" could be met.

"Oh!" said his father, disappointedly, then added, quickly, "certainly; of course. Go right ahead—

or maybe I had better do it for you. You're better at oratory." He smiled invitingly. "Here, take a seat." He indicated the sawed barrel. Pushing the paint cans aside, Adrian Plummer fastened the racquet in the vise. Adjusting his glasses, he bent over the tangle of strings. A deep, sudden happiness was rising in him; he was doing something to serve his favorite.

"*Hmmmm!*" he said, humorously. "Let me get the lay of the land. Well, this land don't seem to have much lay. What do you think about beginning here?"

He called Guy to his side; he hovered over him; he watched him as he worked. He asked his advice; engaged him to hold the pegs . . . it was delicious to have him so close. He worked breathlessly; his fingers flew among the thongs. . . . The chasm was about to be crossed.

There was a shadow in the door—a looming figure—Mrs. Plummer.

"If you want any supper you're going to get the gasoline stove fixed. I told you about it this morning." She thrust the broken piece into his hand. "You got to hurry if you're going to get it to the tin shop before they close."

Adrian Plummer went hurrying down the street, the broken piece bobbing in his hand.

"Come on in," she said, in honey tones, and led the way to the kitchen. "Did you see Dessie to-day?"

In a moment the conversation was where she wanted it.

Now Guy and Dessie were to be married. It had been a happy moment for Mrs. Plummer.

Arnhalt had favored it—at last Dessie was to be made secure. Through his maneuvering Arnhalt had managed to get a house at low terms for Guy. A widow who could not meet her payments had been forced out, and now it was to be the happy home of Guy and Dessie. Guy was to pay Arnhalt a low rental; and now the house was almost ready for occupancy. Adrian Plummer, as his contribution, had painted it. He had taken great pride in his work. He had put on elaborate shades and colors—"fancy painting." He bought paints that he would not be able to use again, to try their effect; he blended colors, put in ocher. The dilapidated building became brilliant. He was happier than he had been in years; sometimes as he stood on his ladder he sang at his work. . . .

He had come, this morning, on the pretext of putting the finishing touches to the house; in reality, it was because he knew that Guy was to inspect it and he wished to be near Guy. He heard a step—it was Guy and Dessie coming to see their new home.

Guy's enthusiasm began to glow as he saw the house. It was to be his home! What an adventure! He was to lead a girl in there and call her his wife. How many glorious and wonderful moments would pass under that roof. There were lots of nice things about Dessie. She would be a "good manager." It seemed wonderful to have a "good manager."

Guy wanted to speak to his father, but Dessie drew him on. "I promised mamma I would be back soon," she said. Adrian Plummer saw them sweep by. The two paused amid a jumble of ladders, boards, and boxes. Paper hangers were at work, climbing

ladders with long strips of paper. Guy moved in a golden daze, as if looking on at something that was not happening to him, but in which he was very much interested.

Dessie took possession of him, steered him through the rooms, talked about the coming day. "Here's where your Morris chair is going to set," she said. She had found it in a mail-order catalogue. It was a marvelous contraption. By pushing a button the back automatically adjusted itself, a foot rest came out. Guy had not wanted a Morris chair, but Dessie had thought that it would "set the room off," give it "class," and had ordered it.

Guy had not liked the house, but it had appealed to Dessie. It was a "darling place"—so near her mother's.

She led him into the kitchen. "This is where our new stove is going," breathed Dessie, and placed her hand on his arm ecstatically. "Isn't it wonderful that I won it? It'll save you the expense of buying one. Mamma is going to help me learn it. She's awfully good at anything that way."

Adrian Plummer followed them as they moved from room to room, childishly eager for their praise. He had done his best on the house and anxiously awaited their approval. But Dessie had no interest in him. She managed to keep Guy away from him.

"How do you like the fancy touches in the gables?" Adrian Plummer managed to ask at last, as he found them for a moment in the yard.

"Very nice," said Dessie. "Of course," she whispered, as she led Guy away, "I wouldn't let him know it, but they're too loud—don't harmonize."

For some moments she expounded harmony. "You can see that, can't you?" She made him see it, just as she had made him see that the wall paper he had chosen was not "artistic." "Of course," she concluded, "he is getting old and we mustn't let on but that we think everything is wonderful. When he comes to see us we must be nice to him and treat him with respect."

Rolling up his paint-smeared trousers under his arm, Adrian Plummer set off down the street. His step was heavy and slow. Once he looked back, then went plodding on.

"Have you thought anything more about who we should have to marry us?" asked Dessie.

Guy looked at her in surprise—the last time they had talked about it it had been settled that his father was to perform the ceremony. Between Guy and his father a new feeling of understanding had risen, and it was Guy's desire that his father should officiate. He had spoken to his father about it and his father had been pleased. Long ago Plummer's old suit of black had gone to pieces and he was now making plans for a new suit for the occasion.

"Why, I—I thought we were going to have father!"

"Well, I have been wondering if that is just the thing. Mamma she says we ought to have the ceremony performed in the church—it's always so much more impressive. Some way or other I wouldn't feel exactly right if we didn't." She looked up at him with her virginal sanctity. "I don't believe any girl who was the right kind would." She managed to show him how hopeless a girl was who wasn't high and noble.

"Don't you think father would be all right?"

Dessie hesitated, as if studying the unfortunate aspects of the case. "Yes . . . of course we could have him. He is a regularly ordained minister—or was. I suppose it would be all right what people said—we would have each other, wouldn't we?" She hugged his arm ecstatically. "After all, that is really what counts." She looked up at him with an adoring expression, as if to say, "Come what will, nothing shall come between us."

She let the matter drop; she had said, for the time being, all that she should.

"Oh, I have something dandy to tell you," cooed Dessie. "Mamma said we could have her car this evening and take a nice long drive together, and she's put up some supper for us and we can stop and eat it in some lovely place in the woods. Isn't she a dear?"

That evening they went spinning away. It was the same road that he and Harlan Thompson had taken when they had driven the "Gay Hottentot" girls. How wonderful Dessie was—so far above those cheap girls! so fine and pure. He wasn't worthy of her. What a blameless life she had led! How true and noble she had always been. He was not worthy to touch her sleeve; yet he could not help crumpling it between his fingers.

Dessie turned to him and smiled invitingly.

"Mamma was asking me last night if we had decided on the day and I told her we hadn't."

Soon they were discussing the happy day . . . it seemed to Guy that he could hardly wait.

CHAPTER XX

GUY stood on the sidewalk, waiting for the prize stove to be delivered. He moved about, as the men lowered it from the wagon, with the proud air of ownership. He walked beside them as they stumbled through the yard, as if in some vague way trying to help them.

Dessie came fluttering down the street. "Hooo-hooo!" she called, and waved her hand.

Guy repeated the words—already agreed upon as their signal—and waved back. What a picture she made!—and soon she was to be his. A vision arose of the pleasant adventures ahead of him.

"Don't let them walk on the seeded ground," said Dessie. "It'll set things back. Make them get off."

Guy had the men keep to the narrow boards, although it was difficult walking. Stumbling, halting, and grunting they exchanged handholds.

Dessie took command of them. Although the men were accustomed to moving stoves, she told them how to get up the back steps, how to get through the door, how to make the turn. She was at them every moment. As soon as the stove was in place she lost all interest in them; they passed out of her life.

Guy was fascinated anew by the stove. He wanted to see again how the foot trips worked, how the draughts were manipulated. He began lighting

matches and holding them close to the thermometer to see if the mercury would rise.

Dessie pulled him away. "Now you may kiss me," she said.

He felt ashamed of himself. Why hadn't he thought of that before? Naturally, a girl expected such things. Next week they would be married. He would not develop into a forgetful, neglectful husband. No, indeed. He would be the best husband in the world. Everybody would talk about him. He continued to make resolves.

"Let's have our first kiss in our new house on top of the stove," he said. That was a splendid thing to think of. He felt proud of himself.

"You get some newspapers and spread them out, and then I will let you—maybe." She shook her finger at him playfully.

He went for the papers, removing picture moldings from them, carpet tacks, screws, brackets, hunks of putty, disassociated parts of door knobs. He shook the dust off the papers. If he had known that it was going to be so much trouble. . . .

They mounted the stove. She held him away for a moment, then allowed herself to be drawn into his embrace.

It was stimulating; he drew her tighter. It was romantic, wonderful. He became more deeply than ever aware of her merit. How warm and soft her cheek felt! He moved his hand over it with a vague, indefinite feeling of guilt. He did not know its source, but it was the teaching of his father that whatever was pleasurable was wrong. He snuggled his face in her neck. It was thrilling to have a girl in

his arms, to feel her warm roundness against him, to feel her heart beating. It stirred him deeply, touched some powerful spring, moved him in a way that he could not understand. Dessie was a sweet girl. What a "wonderful manager" she would make! It was a phrase his mother had repeated to him many times in extolling her virtues and now it was a part of him. There was nothing quite so necessary as a good manager.

A few moments before he had hated to bring out the papers. He ought to be ashamed of himself. Berating himself and with his spirits rising, he continued to hold her in his arms. There was a noise and they jumped—and then laughed. He had touched the foot trip and the door had swung open. It seemed very funny.

"Dessie darling, I love you, I love you," he whispered. His heart was beating fast. "I have always loved you. I think I loved you in some other age. That thought keeps coming and coming to me. You've heard that poem about when you were a pollywog and I was a tadpole—well, I think I loved you then."

He remembered when he had said that before, but now as he held her in his arms he did not care. There was no other girl in the world but Dessie. Nothing else now mattered. He stopped berating himself. After all, he was a pretty good fellow. The town was full of worse. Look at Harlan Thompson, now married, but always chasing down to Kansas City. Guy ran his hands through her hair, brushed it back. He kissed her eyes, her ears. "How does it sound?"

"I'll show you," she said and there was a soft, breathy explosion in his own.

Love was a wonderful thing. It brought out the best in a person. He had always thought that, anyway. Love was what made the world go round. Maybe he would write a poem about it, using in some way these very words. What a slender, shapely hand she had! He twiddled her fingers. He floated along. Always had it been hard for him to use words of endearment—the influence of his father was still on him. He had always avoided them; now he began to use them.

"Darling, you are my sweetheart, my own precious love, my own cooing turtle dove." He laughed at the rhyme. "Aren't you sweetness, dear heart?"

"Of course," she said abstractedly. "By the way, darling, I have been talking it over with mamma and she thinks that, after all we better have a church wedding. It really is more sacred, you know."

He felt a shock, a quick tightening. This meant that his father could not attend.

She kissed him. "Won't that be all right, honey?"

He felt the moist stimulation. It did not seem so important now.

"Yes," he heard himself saying. "I suppose the church is the proper place. Couldn't we move it up a little sooner? Gracious! what do you think I am —Methuselah? Why, I'll be an old man before I'm your boss!"

They laughed. Guy was beginning to feel in his old light spirits. He began to jest. "Holy mackerel! I just can't wait till I get something to eat off 'Beansie.'" They now called the prize stove by that

humorous title. They liked to laugh together; somehow it seemed to bring them nearer.

A smudge from the stove came on his hand. They laughed at it.

"Oh, you b. g.!" She pulled his nose playfully. "Do you know what that means? Big goose. That's what I am going to call you—b. g. Now I'll give you one teeny-weeny kiss."

He seized her. "I must have ten—ten big ones."

He counted them. It was exhilarating; both were quite breathless. It was glorious. Life was wonderful. Why hadn't he appreciated her before at her great, true worth? How blind he had been!

"I must run," she said, suddenly." Mamma's waiting for me." She was gone. "Hooo-hooo!" She peeked through the window, smiling and waving. Guy threw extravagant kisses.

Guy started for the store, his mind on Dessie. He would make her a good husband; he would be kind and true; he would never lose his temper; they would never quarrel. He would build her the nicest house in town, get her cars. She would be proud of him; stand at the window when he came home of evenings.

He turned into Buchanan Street.

"She is really a splendid girl," he told himself. He began to whistle, to walk briskly, to break into snatches of tunes. He became conscious that he was meeting some one. Suddenly he felt something deep and quick in him move, something that seemed apart and unrelated to him. It was Bee.

He had a curious sensation of the world seeming to recede. There was a nervous, sinking feeling in his

stomach; his heart began to beat with deep, powerful force and for a moment he had the feeling that she was unreal, that in some way it was a dream, and yet he knew the reality of it all. When Bee had first gone he had been subconsciously on the alert for her. Often he felt a sudden start—some movement, some article of clothing made his heart bound, but it was never Bee. He had watched the crowds Saturday afternoons, moving up and down the streets, going in and out the stores, for Bee; he had peered into automobiles for her, and as the trains had drawn past the depot platform he had stood silently looking at the faces flitting by; but since he had become interested in Dessie he no longer had such a sense of having lost something. And now he knew that Bee was actually before him!

What did it mean? he kept asking himself. What had happened? Had she come back to haunt him? to make him pay? to break up his marriage with Dessie? As he walked complacently toward her, a hundred explanations flashed through his mind—and yet a person passing him on the street would suspect nothing of his turmoil.

"Bee, is that you? I—I wasn't expecting you. When—when did you come?" he stammered. It was a prosaic, inane speech.

She spoke to him formally.

Guy began to twist his fingers; he could feel something rising in his throat. An unseen something clutched him.

"You—you are looking different," he said.

"Am I?"

"Yes, that is, in a good many ways." He tried to

think how. "You seem older. Of course that would be natural, wouldn't it?" He tried to laugh.

"I suppose we ought to, in all these years," she said.

"I didn't know you were home." It was something to talk about. He began to elaborate it. "I hadn't heard a word about it. It seems strange, doesn't it? —well, coming upon you all of a sudden. I guess very many people don't know you are here, because you'd think I would hear it as soon as anybody." He continued filling in words. "You seem to be, well, more what you might call mature looking, or something," he said at last.

"No, nobody knows," she said. "I came just last night. But I am not trying to keep it a secret. Why should I?"

"There's no reason," he assured her.

How he wished it was over! How long and painful the moments were. Something was rising in his head, a kind of blurring.

"You have come on a visit, I suppose?"

"I'm going to stay here."

"You—you mean all the time?"

"Yes."

His head was pounding; there was a gripping confusion of ideas. "Oh, I see! That will be nice. Does Junction City seem changed to you?" He talked madly on, while his mind was carrying on a dialogue with himself. What would people say? Could he live in the same town with her? Would he have to see her every few days the rest of his life? "Do the buildings look smaller? You know, they always say they do when you've been away." He talked desperately on.

People passing by were staring at them; he had a hazy consciousness of them.

"How is your father?" he asked. He saw him practically every day, but now he asked fervently.

"He seems older."

Guy grasped at it. "That's natural. Everybody is. It's human nature." He ran on incoherently.

Cecil! He must ask about Cecil. He had no interest in Cecil, no feeling for him. At first, after she was gone, he had looked at babies on the street and thought about Cecil. But the babies had never been interesting. They always seemed to be crying or wanting something. He hated that. For a long time he had thought of Cecil as being the same size as he was when he had seen him; and then he realized that Cecil was growing up; he had looked at other children of the same age and dimly wondered what Cecil must be like. But it was curiosity; he had no love for him.

"How is Cecil? I suppose he is quite some kid now."

"Cecil is dead."

Guy stirred; a quick, deep shock ran over him. Something in Bee's tone, the look which rose to her face, made it seem a horrible catastrophe.

He stumbled for words. "He is? When? What was the matter?"

"Fever. I didn't know how to give him the right kind of care." She tried to speak matter-of-fact but in her voice was the feeling of the bitterness of her sorrow. "I put up a little headstone with 'My Cecil' on it. . . . With him gone there wasn't any use staying, so I came back to papa. What people say about me doesn't matter. I am over all that."

Guy felt the weight of her sorrow; he tried to think of something to say, but he could not find the right words. He began to kick a grass root with his toe.

"It just don't seem possible," he said. "He was such a cunning little thing. He was bright, wasn't he?" She nodded; tears came to her eyes. "Who did he look like?"

She put her hands to her eyes and her shoulders rose in a sob. It was torture. How he wished he hadn't said it! A sudden desire to touch her came over him; he felt his palms growing moist; he kept swallowing. He felt that he should be sorry, should bewail Cecil's death—Cecil was his own flesh and blood—but his feeling was for Bee. He wanted to take her into his arms.

She started to move on. He did not want her to go. There were so many real things that he wanted to say. He was now staring intently at her face; over her ears was the same soft wave of hair. The yearning feeling which he had known so long before now came over him again. He wanted to run his hands through the wave, to caress her. She was older, it was true, but her beauty was more settled. She had more than fulfilled her early promise. His eyes seemed glued to her; they moved over her inch by inch—the way he had always studied her face. But the two could not stand there; they must get out of sight of the staring people.

"If you are going home, I'd like to go with you."

She hesitated a moment and silently let him take his place at her side. He tried to think of something to say.

"Do you think I have changed?"

"Do you think we ever change very much?"

He was surprised at the answer; it seemed to uncover him.

They went up the winding drive; the house looked lonelier, almost forlorn. The swing had long ago disappeared from the lawn. The yard was well kept, the house was painted, but something seemed missing.

She led him into the drawing-room. Guy looked curiously around, while he tried to break the constraint. The room had changed but little. An ornamental iron reading lamp with a silk shade had replaced the old-fashinoned "drop light." But the furniture was practically as it had been; Chew had taken little interest in his home since the catastrophe.

Guy looked around the room for something to talk about. On a table, in a silver frame, was the baby picture that he had seen at the "hard-times" party. Her father had tenderly framed it. Now, to Guy, it did not look so shocking—years had passed.

"There's that baby picture of you," he said, lightly. "Say, do you remember that party—how we stayed after it was over and talked and talked? We sat on that sofa. Then I kissed you."

That was a shock—saying it so unexpectedly. Such a thing now seemed so far away from him. He began to talk incoherently.

"Do you remember that poem we used to like so much? Browning's 'The Best of Life Is Yet to Be'? It's going to be that way with you, Bee—your life is just beginning." He began to elaborate on it. "Some day you will go to join Cecil." In his

mounting ardor he did not stop to explore any latent doubt in his own mind. "Maybe all three of us will be there together. You know, I am not so sure about things as I used to be. I don't think people know very much about the future, do you? I don't believe in infant damnation, just because a child isn't born—well, in the usual way. That's all rot."

She covered her face with her hands. Why had he brought such a picture to her mind? He cursed himself inwardly; tried to smooth it over.

He began to want to know what she had done all these years, but he hated to ask. It seemed to him that many strange and wonderful things must have happened to her—while he had been plugging along in Junction City. At last he was able to ask her. "Bee," he said, "where did you go? You have no idea how I felt when I found you had gone."

"I just took baby and went. I didn't know where I was going. I stayed with Aunt Grace in Kansas City for awhile, but I was afraid somebody would see me. I became a coward—when I had always thought myself so brave. I had never cared what people said and now I was afraid of every look they gave Cecil. No, I wasn't very brave. I wanted to take him away, to keep him out of sight, to take him so far that nobody had ever even heard of Junction City. Aunt Grace went with me. She's wonderful, Guy. We went to San Antonio."

Guy stirred with surprise. He had pictured her as being in almost every city of the world—New York, London, Paris—but he had never thought of San Antonio.

"Auntie and I took half of a two-family house. But I was afraid to go out. It was awful."

As she talked Guy suddenly felt the loneliness and bitterness which had assailed her—the long hours, the silent, tearless nights.

"I would get up in the middle of the night and steal to his crib and just sit there with my hand on his head. Some way or other it gave me comfort. I was afraid to walk the streets, to look people in the eyes. I suppose I acted silly, but I wanted to erase everything. I destroyed every clue that would lead back here. I even painted out the initials on my trunk. I told everybody that I was from Maryland. I got a guide book of Baltimore and studied up so that I knew the names of the streets and the stores. I went to the library and read the Baltimore papers and cultivated a Southern accent. I even dyed my hair. I told everybody that Cecil was Aunt Grace's son and that I was his aunt.

"Then I looked around for something to do; I found that I wasn't good for much. There wasn't any place where I could fit in. I didn't know stenography. I hadn't had any office experience, but at last I found an opening as substitute teacher in a music conservatory."

She gave a brief glimpse of their pleasures: of herself and Aunt Grace gathering sticks to cook their supper in Brackenridge Park, of hours spent before the lily ponds, of walks to the peaceful missions.

"And then I met a man. His first name was Richmond and he was the brother of one of the girls in my music class. His father owned a cotton-oil works and Richmond had a motor car and we used

to go out riding in it. There is a lake near San Antonio called Medina Lake. We used to go there and fish and have supper on the shore."

Suddenly Guy felt an intense hatred for the unknown man. From the fragments Bee told him Guy could draw the picture: the man playing his banjo and singing rollicking cowboy songs and Spanish serenades and telling strange tales of buckeroos. There on the shore of the soft Southern lake Guy could see them, the fire crackling, the smell of fish and cooking, and other camps softly glimmering in the distance like fireflies.

"We cooked *frijoles* and *enchiladas*," Bee put in.

"I came to think a great deal of him," Bee continued. "I fell in love with him. I was happy." Guy stirred, and there was a pounding in his ears. His hatred for the unknown Southerner increased.

"Only it hurt when he called me 'Helen.' I was using my middle name and mamma's maiden name. Sometimes I would forget all about—well, about what happened here in Junction City. Then suddenly it would rise up. One day he came after me in his car for a ride and we drew up to a fruit stand kept by a Mexican on the sidewalk. People were passing by and suddenly I thought I saw a face that I recognized. I hadn't had such a feeling for a long time. Something seemed to clutch at my heart, but in a moment the feeling was gone. The person did not stop and I thought it was—well, just another of my spells.

"A few evenings after that Richmond's father and mother gave a big dance." Guy caught a vision of the great Southern house brilliantly lighted for the

occasion—the negroes and Mexicans clustered outside the entrance, watching the arrival of the cars, the snatches of music drifting out on the evening air.

"Just before the dancing began I saw somebody coming toward me—Mrs. J. Myron Seevers." Guy suddenly saw Mrs. Seevers' sharp, bony face moving among the gay revelers, and Bee's terror.

"Things just sort of seemed to slip out from under me. I don't remember much about it—except that I laughed and talked a great deal. At last I got behind some palms and then pretended to faint.

"'I must go home,'" I said.

"Richmond didn't ask any question—just picked me up in his arms and carried me out to his car. When I got home I buried my face in Cecil's crib and cried. He was a light sleeper and woke and smiled. Lots of children waked up in the middle of the night would have cried.

"'Auntie come home to her little mannie?' he asked. It paid for everything.

"I watched the papers until I saw a notice that Mrs. Seevers had left for a stay in California and then I went out again. And then I met her on the street. The society editor had got it in the paper too early. Richmond was with me. Well, after she had gone Richmond and I walked on down the street. People passed; I spoke to them mechanically and while we were walking I made up my mind to tell everything. We went into an ice cream store and there over the table I told him. I suppose other people thought we were just chatting about something. Then we walked down the street and after awhile I came home. I saw him a few times after

that, but we both knew that it was over. He said I was brave and things that way, but it was the end. Men don't have any use for a girl after she has 'made a mistake.' We lived on in the two-family house and soon after that Cecil died. I decided to come back. . . . There wasn't any reason why I should stay away—with Cecil gone—so I came. I knew Mrs. Seevers would be here sooner or later. Have you been here all the time?"

Guy felt a quick, deep admiration for Bee in her struggles, but it was mingled with regret. She had given her heart to Richmond. He hated the Texan intensely, but it was with a curious, interwoven feeling; he hated him for casting Bee aside because she had "made a mistake" and, in the same breath, was elated that she had not married him. He did not understand such mixed feelings.

A sudden tenderness came over him; she was a heroine. And he had caused all her suffering. He hated himself, called himself detestable, and at the same time he wanted to take her into his arms. A delicious expectation rose up in him; it glowed before him. His hands began to hover over her. If he could only touch her! And then abruptly the thought arose before him that she had given her heart to Richmond. After two disasters she could not again care for a man; she had known nothing but bitterness and misfortune from them.

"You used to mean a great deal to me, Bee—in those old days." He waved toward the faded picture. "I thought a lot of you then. I think you look sweeter now—suffering and everything seems to have given you a more holy expression or something.

You know, suffering does." He had heard the statement made and now used it on the spur of the moment. In his emotion he wiped all doubt aside. "You look like an angel—in some way, more noble-looking. I think I have always cared for you. You know what I mean, Bee—always loved you. I don't think people could ever have cared for each other the way we did and not feel that way toward one another, do you?"

Bee sighed heavily. "It's all over."

"No, it isn't," said Guy, quickly. "Such a thing couldn't be over. It doesn't stand to reason."

Bee turned the conversation. "What are you doing now, Guy?"

"Oh, me?" he replied lightly. "Nothing ever happens to me. Back in the store now. Eat three meals a day, go to bed, snore when I sleep on my back—that's my short and uneventful history." He brought the conversation back; his hand fluttered over her. Again, in the past tense, he began talking of love. He felt his heart mounting.

"You meant everything to me. I wanted to follow you, go anywhere, but I didn't know where you had gone. It nearly killed me when I came here and was told you were gone. I would walk miles and miles, and sometimes you would seem to be along with me—I would talk to you." In his fine ecstasy he was now whispering. "I used to pray for you!" His hand lightly touched her shoulder. She moved and he withdrew it.

He was looking at the red arch of her lips. He must kiss her; must take her into his arms, soothe her. It would be wonderful. His heart was pounding.

"Bee," he cried, "I—I do want you."

His hand closed on her shoulder; his fingers trembled.

She shook her head but let his hand stay. He was breathing with suppressed excitement, was swallowing heavily.

"You don't seem to understand. I never wanted anything so much in my life." There were tears in his eyes; he turned his head aside as if to wipe them away secretly, but he hoped she would see.

After a time she looked at his hand. "What is that spot?" she asked.

He looked at the smudge.

"Oh, that's just some old stove black."

"Are you a good boy to help your mother now?" she asked, smiling faintly. It was her old way of petting him—just a bit.

"I wasn't helping—it didn't come from my mother's stove."

His heart was beating heavily, struggling with alarm. Should he tell her? Should he be loyal to Dessie? In the excitement he had forgotten all about Dessie. He felt a growing numbness in his brain. Yes, he would tell Bee, but not just now. He could not tell her now—after what had just happened. He would tell her to-morrow, or the next day.

"I was—fixing up a stove in a new house, that's all, and just happened to get the black on me."

Some quick intuition stirred in her.

"What new house?"

"On Vine Street. There are several houses being fixed up now."

"Whose house is it?"

She dragged the story out of him. Stumbling, halting, he told it; the ridiculous thing of sitting on the stove. He rubbed at the black spot furiously, even after it was gone he moved his hand up and down his trouser leg. He felt his heart sinking.

"So you left her to come here—and talk to me the way you did."

Guy tried to explain. There was no explanation.

In a few moments he found himself out on the street.

CHAPTER XXI

GUY walked away from Bee's house in a stupor. His feet reached out, measured the distance, touched the sidewalk, but he was not conscious of what he was doing. He was going over and over in his mind what he should do. It was sadly confused. What a surprising thing had happened, he told himself. A few hours before he had gone down the street feeling so confident in his future—and then he had met Bee. Again life had gone off at an unexpected angle—"catty-cornered"; the word kept running through his mind. How little has one to do with his own life. Try as one might, he can never direct his course as he wishes; unseen angles and turns come up. Man is but a toy for circumstance, he told himself. He is shuttled first in one direction by some great overwhelming force, then, before he can right himself, he is clutched by some unseen hand and set whirling and tumbling in another direction.

It was the same desire to go ahead, to do what he could within the limitations of circumstance, which he had seized upon during his trials on the rock pile. Everybody is buffeted and battered, he told himself, in effect; the one who is captain of his own soul is the one who does the best possible under his handicaps. They come to all; to some at one time of life, to others at a different period; but they are there. The course never runs smooth. The answer is to keep

going ahead. As the thoughts ran through his mind he reached out with a fierce, determined step. He would keep going ahead!

Even with this new determination, it was not easy. What was right? Which road should he take to keep going ahead? And even after he had started up it, it would be a long time before he knew whether or not he was right. So much of life is fumbling, he thought.

One thing, he told himself, he could not marry Dessie. He felt now that he could not love her. Where he should go from there he did not know. Only that part of the road seemed to lie straight ahead of him. He would advance to that spot and set out anew. It would not be easy to tell Dessie, he knew that. Dessie was not a person to take things lightly; and what would people say of him? Soon they would be whispering that *now* he had jilted Dessie. Would there ever be any end to his deception? He could hear the talk, the gossip, see the black looks cast at him. Soon Mrs. Seevers would be back. With her he was only on probation. She would again bring down the town about his ears. He could again see the process of teaching him a lesson, putting him in his place, and he quivered. He knew only too well the power of a community. And now with Bee back in Junction City it would be worse. New indignation would rise up against him. A light seemed to clear.

"Let them howl," he said. "I'm going to break it off."

He increased his pace with this new determination, fingers clenched, teeth set. And then he felt a satis-

faction; the biggest part seemed over—he had fought it out within himself. He began to feel light-hearted.

But he had to work three hours more in the store before he would be free for the day. He went back to the small, petty, endless round. His first enthusiasm began to wane; if he had gone when he had first made up his mind, it would not have been so difficult. He began to think of excuses. Maybe he could let things drift along and maybe they would come out all right. Many times they did, he told himself. He would break it off gradually, then it would not hurt so much. He would be not quite so attentive, maybe run down to Kansas City. Then he saw that he was excusing himself. It was not to save her suffering, as he pretended to think, but to find the easiest way out for himself.

"I'm going to do it to-night," he said, and satisfaction rose within him. How many times the fight must be renewed, he told himself. One could not be captain of his own soul and remain in such exalted command without constant renewal of determination. Again he felt a lightness within him, an unknown something which seemed to lift him up swiftly and gently, as at carnivals and county fairs he had seen toy balloons lifted.

That evening, after supper, he started to Dessie's to break the news.

Cod was standing in the door of his pool hall. He was now older and fatter and more prosperous-looking. Diamonds had begun to glisten on him. One was fastened in his shirt front, and he wore a bow tie, that none of the stone's brilliance might be

lost. His wife now had "hired girls," but they did not stay long. Unless they were particularly old and decrepit, Mrs. Dugan would have to send them away. It was because Cod "deviled" them so, in the words of his cronies. At first he would begin to "jolly" them, making humorous comments about their cooking, then he would begin to watch them through the meal, as they came in and out; soon he was putting his hands on them; after a time he began entering by the kitchen door.

The Pastime had prospered; Cod was "on to his business." His efforts to keep things "going" had not been in vain. The front had been painted and new blinds added, for he now owned the whole building. A commercial college had taken the upstairs and Cod had been most obliging in making repairs and alterations. Afternoons, the girls, who had come in from the country and surrounding towns to take a "short commercial course," went up and down the stairs which led to the school rooms. During these hours Cod lounged near the door and watched the girls as they climbed the steps. Sometimes he engaged them in conversation; if they wanted to make a train he was only too glad to run them down.

"Why, hello, old socks!" greeted Cod. "How's William Jennings? You haven't done much spouting lately, have you? Come on in and smoke up. This is on the house. Some stepper ain't she?" He cocked a whitish eye at a late girl leaving the stairway and hurrying down the street. His gold teeth flashed into view in a smile that was meant to be one of mutual understanding. "Put some in your pocket,"

he said, attempting to stuff a handful into Guy's coat. "What's a few cigars between friends? I don't mind telling you that I am feeling pretty good to-day. Just got back from Kansas City. While there I signed up a lease on a corner location for a new pool hall. I'll run this shebang, too, and probably keep the wife and family here, but a good deal of the time I'll be down there keeping that one going. I'm going to have everything fixed up bon-ton, too, When you're down to K. C. some time drop in and see me. I'll show you the town. It ain't all on the picture post cards at the ten-cent store, you know." Chucking Guy in the ribs, he gave a humorous click of his tongue. He continued to tell of the wonders of the city. "Say, I heard a good one," he said. "It goes this way—" Sitting on the corner of a pool table, one leg swinging, he began to unload the story.

But Guy's taste for polluted stories was gone. Once such a story would have seemed stimulating; now it left a taste in his mouth. But the others were interested; they bent toward Cod intently, their lips already parted in smiles.

Guy turned toward the door.

Cod's leg stopped swinging. "What's the big rush?" he called. With a huge puff he blew the ashes off his cigarette.

"I don't think I want to hear it," said Guy.

"Heard it before?"

"No, I simply don't want to hear it."

"Come on back and be a good fellow." Cod tried to coax him, to wheedle him, but Guy was not to be drawn back. Suddenly the cheapness of the

place rose before him. The door snapped behind him.

A look of astonishment came into Cod's face. He could not understand anyone not wanting to hear his stories—and especially after he had just filled him up with cigars. "He ain't anybody to set up as any Billy Sunday," he said. The circle laughed, licked their tongues. "In fact, he's about the last person in town to come any holier-than-thou stuff. It wasn't very long ago that he ruined one of the sweetest girls I ever knew." He related the facts to the newcomers. At last, Guy was dismissed and the funny story was continued. It was a great success.

Guy walked down the street; a still voice kept whispering to him to put off the ordeal, to delay. But at last he forced himself to turn up the path to the house. It would not be easy—he knew that.

Dessie came fluttering into the room. The light down on her lip was moist.

She was astonished to see him back again the same day, but immediately she found an explanation. It was her charm.

"Hello, b. g.!" she greeted him and held up her lips. "Look at this." She displayed a yellow envelope. "I got it just a few minutes ago. It's from Uncle Edward and Aunt Ella. They're coming from Nebraska."

"Coming?" asked Guy.

Dessie looked at him steadily. "Why, to our wedding! It's going to be a huge success. All the girls are excited about it, but I won't tell them a word. Oh, you've got that sober look again!" She

chided him, flew from one thing to another, took possession of him.

"*Sssh!*" she whispered with mock elaboration, holding her finger to her lips. "Come with me and I'll show you something that'll make your heart go pit-a-pat. Promise me you'll like it." She extracted the promise and then led the way upstairs "Hide your little eyesies."

He felt the pressure of her hand and she led him into the room.

The clammy touch was gone. "Now you can look around."

He stared in bewilderment. It was the room where the wedding dress was being made. There was confusion; the dressmaker had been working; a sewing machine; odds and ends of dress goods, threads, ravelings on the floor, materials strung over chairs. The dress itself was on a "dummy." Guy stared at the stiff, headless body and at the wire legs.

"Do you know what it is?" she gurgled.

"Yes—your dress."

"My trousseau!" she corrected him. "You don't know what a great and wonderful privilege it is for a mere man to see it before the time. Don't you think it is splendid? Mamma kept after the woman till she got everything right. Mamma is wonderful that way. She is going to be such a help to me in getting my clothes. Crêpe de Chine looks so much better for a day wedding. Honestly, now, don't you think I am going to look sweet?" She wound her fingers in his hair.

Now he must begin. There was a ringing in his ears, a nervous trembling in his hands. Dessie was

chattering on, repeating something about a "mere man."

"Dessie, I want to say something," at last he managed to stammer out.

She beamed on him. "Take this nice, comfy rocker and stretch out your little footsie-tootsies." She drew up a worn red-plush rocker and humorously pushed him into it. "Now spread out your little kneesies." She plopped herself on them.

He could not go on. He must think of something else to say. All that he had prepared slipped from his head; there was a dull ringing in his ears, a confused sense of whirling.

"Why is that bed sheet on the floor?" he asked, for time.

"We keep it under the dummy so that the dress won't touch the carpet."

How much trouble girls went to for a wedding! he thought. How much it meant to them! It was the biggest event of their lives.

"Mamma's promised me some of her ramblers to plant under our bay window. Won't that be fine?" For some moments it furnished a topic of conversation.

Now he must tell her. It had never occurred to him that it would be in the upstairs room, with all the wedding preparations before him. He looked about; for years afterward he would be able to remember every detail, he told himself. His eyes passed over the walls, fastening on the faded family photographs dangling from long silver wires. One was a duplicate of the picture of her father in his high, stiff collar, hanging on the wall of his office.

Another showed him in his lodge uniform, with his white-plumed hat reposing on his breast. Between the windows was a wall motto: "The Peace of God Be on This House." His eyes fixed on it. And he was the person who was to upset this peace.

"Let's go downstairs," he said, but she held him to the rocker.

"No, not till you tell me your big, nice secret."

"Dessie, I don't think I ought to marry you," he heard himself say.

He cleared his throat; the ringing grew louder. He had the feeling that he was stumbling, halting, trying to make it easy, not succeeding, but the words continued to come. He felt her stiffen in his lap; she got out; moved to a chair. Her hands went to her face; tears came between her fingers, sobs shook her body. The strange hoarseness continued. There was a confused sense of not being able to say what he wished.

Her hands came down. "Is there some other girl?"

"No, Dessie, there isn't. You see, it is this way." He was explaining again. It was a miserable, blundering job.

"Guy," she cried, "we must go on. The invitations are out—everybody knows. What will people say? My dress. We can't stop." She flung her arms around his neck.

He took them away gently, went on explaining, clearing his throat. At last he had the feeling that he was near the end.

"Well, good-by," he said, and, reaching out, shook hands with her. That was an absurd thing to do. He found himself going out the door. The door

mat had become twisted. He straightened it with care, then started down the street.

It had been a mean job, but now it was over. He breathed with relief; began to whistle. People were watering their lawns; the whirling water sprays turned monotonously, the water falling with a soft *swish* on the grass. He could hear the low throb of the city electric-light plant. From its high stack a pillar of black soft coal smoke rose straight into the air. It was a breathless evening. It seemed strange that the outdoors should be so quiet and peaceful, when inside he had just gone through such a stormy scene. He remembered how he had read somewhere that *now*, this very minute, was the big moment to somebody some place in the world. It was small and insignificant, but it stuck in his mind; just as what the Chautauqua lecturer had said about frozen thoughts and cutting off the top of one's head. At times he seemed to be a crazy patchwork of small things he had seen and heard. How hit and miss life was! Was there any sense to it? Now that he looked back he could see how life had piled up on him, and all from little things. He resented it. No! life was something bigger than a hodgepodge of fragments. He tried to figure it out, but in a moment he was thinking about himself, going over the scene in the room before the headless dummy. He had bungled things; hadn't carried himself off the way he had expected.

He reached in his pocket for a cigar. He had counted on having a good smoke after it was all over. He pulled it out; it was broken. She had crushed it when she had plopped herself on him! He

licked the wrapper and tried to light the cigar, but it wouldn't draw. "Dang it! what the devil!" he said, and threw it down. He was provoked: it seemed outrageous that he couldn't have a smoke when he wanted it. "Oh, damnation, that's the way things always go," he said. He was quite stirred up over the cigar.

He stopped in a store to get another, but none suited him.

"It's a cheesy place," he said, and waved his hand over Junction City. One time it had seemed so wonderful, so much the center of the universe. Now it was impossible.

A man, in the driveway of his yard, was under his car. "Nell," he called to his wife in the house, "hand me that wrench on the hood." It would be but a step for Guy to give it to him.

"Let him holler," said Guy and stalked on.

He went stumping down Mulberry Street. The water tower on its steel legs stood outlined against the evening sky. 'Buses went rumbling past on their way to the station, suitcases piled high on top, strewn over the fenders. He passed his father's stolid, heavy, brilliantly painted house. He could not go in just yet. He took another turn; the man was now out from under the automobile. It was old man Hardesty, the man whose team had been tied to the hitch posts the night he and Bee. . . . Everything seemed to lead back to Bee. Guy looked at him savagely. He thought he had disposed of him long ago. How people held on!—especially people who didn't amount to anything. Now old man Hardesty had moved to town and was going

to "run" for something. Two or three persons were talking to him—and Hardesty was smoking. Guy caught the faint aroma. It was maddening. This was the man who, Guy had once so confidently said, ought to be run out of town; now he was the center of a respectful group and would probably be a county official. Life was a puzzler. Once it had seemed so easy of solution; he had known so much about it. Now it was a bewildering maze.

He started to turn in at his own house; hesitated. He knew that the screen door would be hooked. He would press the button and his mother would come lumbering to the door, wiping her hands on her apron He must tell her. In his imagination he could see her great breast rising and falling, could hear her heavy, rending sighs: "O Lord! O Lord! What made you do it? And Dessie such a good church girl. If your father had only kept his mouth shut! Where is he now?—out to the barn, as usual, I suppose. Call him. I just feel as if I wouldn't last out the day. O Lord! Hum-hummmm!"

He could not go in—not yet. Again he started to walk.

What had he done? What had made him do it? Something bigger than himself had driven him on. So much of life was made up of things he did not understand. He was driven by blind forces whose existence he was not even aware of. He seemed like a chip on a rushing stream. First this way, then that. What he had now done would only make matters worse. The news would soon be out; it would soon be flying up and down the streets; they would be gossiping it over back fences; jesting about it at the

pool hall. Word would be rushed to the invited guests; there would be telegrams; the greenhouse would be notified. The papers would have it. Guy Plummer had done something else. He had ruined one girl; now he had jilted another. Again they would dig up his past; go over it deliciously, inch by inch. What a morsel! He could see Mrs. J. Myron Seevers rolling it under her tongue. She had always known that young Plummer was no good. It was a law of nature. It was time for people to put him in his place, once and for all. He should never have been allowed to mingle with self-respecting people. Dessie was such a sweet girl; a hundred times too good for him. Mrs. Seevers would become quite enthusiastic about Dessie.

There was a disturbing sound, a confused tooting. Guy looked up. Harlan Thompson had drawn up in his car. He was sitting in his shirt sleeves, puffing at the stub of a cigar. Harlan had married Pearl Duncan and was now a successful business man. He was always first to see a pretty girl coming down the street, and as he carried on a conversation with some other person, he would turn slowly to watch her pass. During this time his answers were mostly "Yes" or "No." Again his eye would rove the streets. As he talked to women—especially to girls—he put his hands on them, pinched their ears, sometimes even their noses. When they bent over and their waists lost their accustomed positions, he stared with eager eyes. He liked to crowd several persons into his car and take a spin out in the country "for a breath of fresh air," and usually he managed to have at least two girls in the seat with

him. On such occasions he was the life of the party. He kept them going. Now when he talked with men it was not about his conquests; it was about sharp business deals he had put over. He had made quite a go of the lumber business. Business often called him to Kansas City. When he returned, two or three days later, he was in bad humor and sleepy. Then the family had to pinch on household expenses. His wife was not able to go out much, as she was usually too tired.

Harlan was considered a model citizen and a "live wire." When they wanted a street fair, or an Old Settlers' Day, or a home-coming, they always went to Harlan first. If they got him behind it, it was sure to go over with a rush. He was a booster from Boosterville. Mrs. J. Myron Seevers thought it was a pity that the town didn't have more like him.

"Hello, old sport!" called Harlan. "Thinking about the big doings? You don't look as happy as a fellow ought to who is getting ready to start on a honeymoon." He looked at Guy craftily. "It's going to be pretty soon, isn't it?"

"Yes, pretty soon," said Guy.

"Everything going all right, is it?" he asked, with an air of generality.

"Yes, everything," returned Guy.

"Well, I guess I'd better be shoving along. Got a committee meeting on to-night. It sure keeps a fellow humping these days." The car started, and as it moved off he turned to wave his hand in great friendliness.

Guy turned back toward the house. The news was out.

CHAPTER XXII

WHEN Guy awoke the next morning the alarm was ringing. His father no longer came to the head of the stairs to call him; his face no longer appeared over the top step. Responsibility had laid its hand upon Guy and to meet it he had bought an alarm clock. He arose at half past seven, ate his breakfast, and then went to the store. He had moved to the "spare" bedroom. Few persons now ever came to stay overnight in the Plummer home, but when Guy first told his mother that he was going to give up the cramped quarters of his own room, with only a percale curtain to hang his clothes under, and move into the guest room where there was a closet and two windows, she was horrified.

"No, you mustn't do that," she said, and had become nervous about it. But a few days later found Guy in the room. Here at night, propped up in bed, he read his law books. At first she had demurred about this—it mussed up the bed, ruined the pillows, strained his eyes, and there had been an exchange of words about it, but Guy had continued his reading.

Guy dressed before the mirror, hardly noticing his own reflection. With his coat, collar, and tie in his hand he started down to the bathroom to shave. The boards of the stairs creaked under his weight, and as he went down the steps he stooped that he might not bump his head. His father was sitting in

the rocking chair, which was now understood to be his. Once he had sat in the straight upright chairs, but bit by bit he had gone to the ease of the rocking chair. He was now holding in his hand a broad-toed, lace shoe. Since he had taken up the rough work of painting he could no longer wear his prized "congress" shoes. Always before, of a morning, he had slipped on his "congress" shoes with satisfaction, but now sometimes he would sit for ten minutes before he could bring himself to put on the heavy, paint-spotted lace shoes. The shoes ran over at the heel, the strings broke and he had much trouble with them. Sometimes, after he was caught in the rain, he left them on the back porch, rather than clean them. The next morning he fished around in the wood box for a shingle, put the shoes in the oven of the kitchen stove and dried them off. In their stiffened condition he stamped heavily on the floor.

Mrs. Plummer looked at him scornfully. "You certainly make a lot of fuss getting on your shoes."

On the mornings she felt particularly critical he took them out on the back porch and there continued his struggles.

Guy and his father looked at each other.

"Good morning," his father said, thickly, with an air of embarrassment. Then he changed the position of his feet, for his shoes hurt.

"Good morning," said Guy. "Is it going to clear up?"

Adrian Plummer bent over to look out the window. It pleased him to be asked his opinion on the weather. He considered himself an excellent weather prophet. The first thing each morning he made a trip to the

barn, although Prince had gone long ago, fussed with the few bits of the harness yet remaining, and then studied the weather. Guy had brought from the drug store for his birthday a present of a combination barometer and thermometer. It was what was called a "fancy" thermometer and a great improvement over the small weather glasses with almost invisible marks to which Adrian Plummer had been accustomed. He was immensely proud of it. He fastened it just outside his window so that he could see it without leaving his rocking chair. A dozen times a day he put on his glasses and bent over to read it.

"The glass says change," returned Adrian Plummer. "It's pretty reliable."

Guy went into the kitchen. His mother was putting wood in the stove. The kerosene burner was now covered with oilcoth and would be used as a shelf until spring.

"Good morning," she said, as she rose with the stove lifter in her hand. "Did you sleep good?"

She sought to open a conversation with him. She always stopped in her work, when Guy passed through the sitting room, to listen to what he and his father said. When Guy came into her section of the house she tried to make the conversation more elaborate than the words he had exchanged with his father.

"Pretty well," replied Guy.

"Here's some hot water."

Going into the bathroom, Guy shaved. After a time he came out.

"I've set the things on," she said.

At the signal the three started for the table, and as Mrs. Plummer came out of the kitchen there was a slight jarring of the windows. Briefly Adrian Plummer bowed, mumbled a few words under his breath, and then passed the bread. No longer was there an ardent, extended appeal.

Guy was struck with how much older his father was. His burnsides were now almost white; great lines and wrinkles had come into his face. His hand was no longer steady, and in shaving small patches and growths of hair were missed. Usually some place on his lower lip there was such a bristly spot. Guy looked; it now showed. The hair on the backs of his hand had grown thicker and in it were specks and spatters of paint. Only on Sundays was he able to get it all off. But on Sundays he did not go to church. Instead he went to the barn and there opened his Bible. But he did not read long. Soon he would be staring at the wall, or walking aimlessly about the barn or in the horse lot. In the lot he now kept the long ladders and the wheeled cart which he used in transporting the ladders as the jobs came to him. The corners of the lot were full of ticklegrass, and in some places jimpson weeds had started to grow. These he pulled and, beating off the dirt, threw them into the alley. Then after a time he would get the *Christian Herald* and begin to read it. On Sundays his neighbors would go downtown, waiting for the Sunday papers, rattle home in their cars, and, sitting on the front porch, read them; but not with Adrian Plummer. Monday morning, however, when his own paper came through the mail, he read it from beginning to end.

He now rarely used the "study"—Mrs. Plummer had found that it was necessary to have a "store room."

As Guy faced his father and mother his heart began to beat. It was not easy to tell them. In fact, nothing had ever been easy to tell them. His mother began to pile up the dishes, swishing the water around in the coffee cups.

"Bee Chew is back in town," Guy said.

Mrs. Plummer put down the cup. "What's she doing here?" she demanded. "I suppose she's come back to rub it in; it would be just like her."

"She's not that sort," said Guy. "She wouldn't do anything of the kind."

He defended her hotly while Mrs. Plummer gathered the scraps into a smeared plate.

"Did you see the little boy?" Mrs. Plummer asked at last.

"He's dead."

"Dead!"

Her heavy face showed emotion. Her lips began to mumble, half whispering, half moaning. "I suppose it's just as well." She continued to whisper half-formed sentences as she rattled the plates. "Yes, he's better off. But she ought to 've written instead of coming home and shockin' you." Suddenly she quivered with emotion; a revengeful flash came into her eyes. She had started to the kitchen with the dishes, but now she came back and set them down. "She's come back to try to break you off with Dessie—that's the reason she's back."

"I'm not going to marry Dessie."

Mrs. Plummer sat down heavily. Her great face

began to work. "O Lord! O Lord!" she moaned, expelling her breath with a thick, hoarse sound. "That's what that dream meant." Mrs. Plummer was an ardent believer in dreams and interpreted all catastrophes by them. "Let me go and see her. I can handle her. She's a good Christian character."

"It won't do any good," said Guy.

"Just let me try."

She continued to urge, pointing out new virtues on the part of Dessie. At last Guy turned to her with determination. Once he would have let her interfere, would have taken the way which seemed easiest, but now he was firm.

"You shall not see her," he said, with feeling. "It is all over and I will have nothing more to do with her." His mother's face dropped; she turned to the plates, began to scrape out a dish. She recognized the firmness of the tone. In her own words, he was "set." At last she went lumbering into the kitchen and began piling the dishes into the pan. "O Lord! O Lord!" she moaned from time to time. "Won't things never end? Sometimes I just think I can't stand it. I suppose I better wash my face."

She bent over the sink, dashing the cold water with her great hands over her face. Then she went lumbering across to the towel, the windows rattling slightly.

Adrian Plummer looked at his watch, but lingered at the table with Guy. There was now less and less constraint between them. Plummer now found Guy "easier to talk to."

"I don't think you are missing very much by not marrying Dessie," he said. It was as near as he ever came to criticizing a person.

It was time to start to work. Adrian Plummer went for the bundle of his painting clothes, wrapped up in a paper, while Guy found himself lingering on the porch. They walked down the street together. His father was beginning to limp; rheumatism had "settled" in one leg. They walked slowly, as if disliking to hurry. They did not talk all the time, but there was a feeling of companionship between them expressed in words, tones, looks, and inflections.

Guy finally managed to carry the bundle.

As they passed the Monopole Barber Shop one of the barbers spied them. He spoke to the others and Guy could hear persons in the shop coming to the door, and he had the sense that they were talking about him. A laugh rang out. Two persons passing in an automobile turned to stare at him. As the car passed the barber shop, some one called to the two in the car. The two returned an answer; there was more laughter.

Guy felt his father stiffen.

"Guy," said Adrian Plummer, "they're going to talk about you again, but don't pay any attention to them. Be sure of yourself and go ahead. But I guess you will," he said, with a look of admiration "You didn't before."

In some way which he could not express Guy seemed to come nearer his father; and as they walked his father kept his head turned slightly in Guy's direction.

At last they had to part. "I'll have to leave you," said Adrian Plummer, as he turned off. "Good-by."

"Good-by," said Guy, and waved his hand.

The town was stirred. Again indignation flamed up against Guy. He had not only ruined one girl, but also had broken the heart of another. Again the town tried to come down on Guy, but this time it was not so successful. He had now got his balance; his roots had taken hold; that which people said no longer seemed important. So long as he was right within himself, there was little else to fear. He no longer walked in the deserted race track; no longer went off on excursions by himself, no longer avoided people. He continued quietly at his work; the things which had once held him no more had appeal. The kind of life that Harlan and Cod were leading had no interest for him. He must find something of a more intellectual nature. He immersed himself deeper in his law.

It was a severe blow to Mrs. J. Myron Seevers when she returned from her California "tour" to find that Bee was back. She was quite provoked with herself for having stayed so long.

The person most affected was the one that the town thought least about—Chew. He had seen the seeds he had planted bear fruit—and they were much like the foul balls of the osage hedge. He had always felt so sure of himself, had had so much confidence in his belief—and then disaster had come down upon him.

He had believed that he had the confidence of his daughter, that she would tell him anything, share any trouble that rose, and then the test had come and she had gone to one of her own kind—to Aunt Grace. The blow stunned him; his foundation rocked.

He was lonely in the great house. Once he had

been content to sit in an easy chair in the drawing-room, reading, but soon he became restless. He moved from room to room, seeking something which was not there. He tried reading in another room; it was not successful. He went to Bee's room and tried reading there, but soon he was staring at the pictures on the wall. He had a reading light placed over the head of his bed and began reading in bed; but after a time he closed his book and turned out the light. The glare hurt his eyes, he said. He slept little; sometimes he would turn on the light and again try to read, but without success. Then the light would go out again.

The house did not suit him; he began to find many faults with it. He painted it, but after a few weeks he found that it was not the right shade. He had the trim and window casing painted another shade. He built a breakfast room and had plants in pots and jars hung from supports, and for a time had breakfast contentedly among them, but soon he lost interest and went back to the lone dining room. His car was a source of comfort! But soon, Ed, the man-of-all-work, did not suit him. He had several other drivers in rapid succession. With a new man in front he sped restlessly up and down the country roads; he drove into Iowa, into Nebraska, and into Kansas; even made a trip over the Custer Battlefield Memorial Highway, but he was no sooner back than he started again. He went to Chicago to attend opera, leaving word at the office that he would be gone a week, but three days later he was back. He found business which would take him to New York; he bought a new bag and set out on his journey as

excitedly as a boy. But soon he returned; he did not like the city. It had grown cold and stifling. He was once the best-dressed man in Junction City, but now he became careless. He belonged to a "pressing club," which for a certain amount a year pressed all the clothes he wished to send, but soon he neglected to take his suits to its office. He did not seem to notice the spots which began to appear on his clothes. He no longer traveled over the state, speaking at banquets and before clubs and associations. Once he had been a favorite before the Rotary clubs, but now he shunned them. When a telegram came urging him to attend, he found some excuse. Once when distinguished visitors had come to Junction City he had ridden down the street with them and had introduced them to the audience, but now when the Governor or a man of prominence came he took an obscure seat in the hall; then after a time he began to squirm, to glance at his watch, shift his feet, and finally slipped out. He resigned as chairman of the school board and gave up one after another of his interests. He became the principal mover in establishing a golf course. Never had Junction City known such an institution. Few of the business men had ever had a stick in their hands, but Chew called meetings, secured options on land, and launched himself with great enthusiasm into the building of a golf club. It was the first thing he had taken an active interest in for some time. He pushed the club through with his old zeal and enthusiasm. At last it was finished; a title holder was brought on to play an exhibition game and there were ceremonies and festivities. For several days Chew did not go

near his office, for his interest in playing, but soon his enthusiasm waned. After a time he contented himself with paying his dues; his golf bag grew crumpled and moldy in the garage.

He began to take up strange cults and beliefs. He became an ardent supporter of current phases of "new thought." Queer philosophical journals began to pile up on his center table; some were half in English and half in the strange hieroglyphics of some East India language. He practiced deep breathing and rhythmic movements; abruptly, in walking down the street, he would begin to flop his arms and flex his muscles while he filled his lungs, counting ten. He began to talk in visionary symbols and in phrasing which meant nothing to his companions. He found new synonyms for the soul—"the life spirit," "the cosmic flame"—and talked of it endlessly. He took up spiritualism and went to St. Louis to attend a course of lectures, but came away unsatisfied. He turned from first one thing to another, constantly reaching out for something which he could not attain. Sometimes he seemed almost on the verge of finding what he wanted—but each time it slipped through his fingers.

His health began to fail. He went to "springs" and health resorts—Mt. Clements, French Lick, and Hot Springs. He took "cures" and mud baths, but did not grow better. Eruptions came on his skin; he had abscesses; endless rashes appeared. He went to new health resorts, but at each he found something he did not like. He came home for short stays, but soon went away again. He began to dislike his house, which had once meant so much to

him. He put it in the hands of a real-estate agent, but there was no one in Junction City who could afford to buy it. It was advertised in the Kansas City papers but without success. He began to yearn for the sights and sounds of his youth and finally set out with eager expectations for his old boyhood home in Indiana. But he soon found it depressing. There had been so many changes, he said.

He found less and less interest in reading. The books which had once stimulated him, now could not hold his attention. There was dust on *The Age of Reason.* He kept constantly reaching for an invisible something which never came within his grasp.

When Bee returned, new life came to him. His careless, easy way came back. He laughed and talked; they went for long rides, but after a time he said he felt depressed; he said that it was because Cecil had died. He went back to it time after time. If Cecil had lived things would be better, he said. He talked only about the things which had happened during the days of his success. Affairs of the present had little interest for him. Once he had followed the political news with great interest; now the candidates for office seemed small and insignificant upstarts, actuated by greed and employing chicanery. After a time he stopped voting. His law practice fell off; he took it complacently. Younger men pushed ahead; it seemed unimportant what they were doing. He continued in his narrowing round.

But instead of seeing all this, the town saw the heinous things Guy had done. It saw Bee staying closely indoors, saw her moving behind drawn blinds,

but that was to be expected. She had been "weak"; she had "given away to herself." Dessie, on the other hand, had led an exemplary life. She was a sweet, innocent girl—much too good for him. The town became quite stirred up over Dessie. Whatever standing Guy now had was due to Dessie. She had taken him up when nobody would have anything to do with him; she had "put him forward." And this was her reward! But the town might well have saved itself its spleen, for six months later Dessie married Ed Hoecker.

Hoecker considered it a brilliant match.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOECKER and Dessie went to Yellowstone Park on their honeymoon. They drove in Dessie's father's car and when they returned Hoecker asked if they might keep the car until they got "straightened around." After a time, Arnhalt gave it to them.

Hoecker settled back on his prospects. The commission business wasn't what it once was, he said. He began staying home late, mornings; sometimes he would not get down until noon. He said that he had his men so well trained that it did not matter. After a time, however, the company thought it advisable to try another man in his place, and Arnhalt took Hoecker into his real-estate business. For a space, Hoecker applied himself with great enthusiasm, then began to find other things more interesting. Business was "too much of a grind." He joined a lodge and became one of its most ardent members. He bought many ornate and lavish uniforms, resplendent with plumes and braid. He liked to form the men into ranks and to drill them. He was never too busy or too tired for this. At last he became head of the Junction City branch of the order and began going to other cities to represent it at conventions. He liked to get on trains, when the cars were decorated with flags and banners, and be the life of the party. He went to conventions

in Omaha, Denver, and once to San Francisco. On such occasions he wore silk shirts with his initials worked on the sleeves, and often found occasion to leave his coat off. At first, Dessie went with him to these conventions, but soon she found it more convenient to remain at home. When he went to the cities he patronized the best hotels and restaurants and made many acquaintances in the lobby. When there was an orchestra he sent up word what selection he wanted played. He called the waiters "George" and made presents to the manicurists. He rarely ever read a book, but found a great deal of satisfaction in detective stories. It took a good one, he said, to fool him on the way it was going to turn out. He could outguess them almost every time. He liked musical comedies, and when a live one with real "pep" came to Kansas City, he went. Often, if it was a particularly good show, he went to Des Moines to see it again. Sometimes he would volunteer to drive some of the members of the cast across in his car.

When he was not away on trips and at conventions, he worked in the office with Arnhalt. As soon as "the old man" died, he said, he was going to take hold of the business and run it the way it should be run. He had big ideas.

But there were no such easy days for Guy. He continued his weary, monotonous round at the Owl Drug Store. The things which brought Ed Hoecker pleasure were not the ones to give Guy satisfaction. He turned more and more to his books; immersed himself more deeply in law. His interests were growing more intellectual.

He rarely saw Bee. From time to time she and her father went off to some "cure." Some days later he would see them returning, Chew sitting back in the car, surrounded by bags and suitcases. On such occasions the two rode past the store without looking in his direction.

One day the telephone rang, and when Guy answered it it was Bee. Furiously he began to mark hieroglyphics on the order pad.

"Is that you, Guy?" she said.

Something was wrong; he could tell that from her voice. He felt a sudden fear quicken in himself.

"Guy, could you come down at once?" she said. "Daddy is ill."

"Yes," he heard himself saying, "I'll come."

His heart sank; something seemed to run out from under him, as it always did when he heard bad news, but in a moment his heart began to gather speed. He had a curious sense of elation—and then felt ashamed of himself.

"Yes, I'll be right down," he said.

He had not expressed any word of sorrow; had extended no sympathy. He was thinking about himself. What did this mean? he asked. She had turned to him first. It thrilled him. For a brief moment he did not care if her father died, and then he began to think of the conflicting emotions which go on in the human mind. What wars are waged in it. How much life is within; how little the world sees!

He walked down Buchanan Street. The house which had once so impressed him stood out among

the trees. The slate roof still showed the same fanciful designs, but he was no longer awed. He turned up the winding drive. scarcely giving it a thought.

A doctor's car was standing at the door and there were other signs of activity. The house gave forth a depressed air.

Bee met him at the door. He gave a start—her appearance always thus affected him. She was the same and yet he always had the feeling that she looked different. Even in her perturbed state the wave of hair held its place over her ears. Guy began going over her face, bit by bit, absorbing every detail.

"Come in," she said. "He seems better now. It came on so suddenly. I had to have somebody around," she said, then added, "so I have sent for Aunt Grace."

There was a hushed silence over the house, but yet there was a feeling that many persons were moving and carrying on activities. Guy saw the cook listening, saw the chauffeur on the kitchen porch waiting for some errand to run. A stout woman wearing a white cap moved calmly down the hall; for a moment he wondered who she was, then realized that she was the nurse. He had never seen a nurse before; all the nurses he had ever known in cases of illness were relatives and neighbor women who came in to "sit up." Two doctors came out of the room and, going into another, closed the door. A specialist from Kansas City had been sent for.

Guy followed behind Bee, alive to every look and

action, his heart beating rapidly. He began to wish there was something great and magnificent that he could do to help her. He was responsible for her trouble, he told himself; now if there was only something splendid he could do to lift it from her shoulders. If there were only some wonderful doctor he could go to and intercede to come to the patient; or if he could only ride for some medicine which would save the stricken man—he had heard of such heroes. But no such glories opened before him. Instead, he was useless; in fact, he was in the way. At sight of him the doctors frowned and the nurse regarded him with open suspicion. Doors closed in his face, whispered consultations stopped. At last, however, the doctors went away, and Guy breathed easier.

"On such an occasion you must be strong," he found himself saying to Bee. And then he thought what a prosaic thing it was to say, but now being prosaic did not seem such a catastrophe. He continued to hover over her, and from time to time whispering something meant to be of comfort.

She disappeared into the sick room.

"Daddy wants to see you," she said.

Guy felt a tremor of excitement. What was going to happen? he asked himself. How should he act? Should he be sad, or should he try to cheer him up?

Chew was lying in a mahogany single bed, on the the head of which were carvings; and there were four ornamental posts. How different it was from the cheap walnut or white-enamel bedsteads which Guy had known! The blinds were drawn and over the room was the faint odor of sickness. The nurse had

brought in a white bed table and on it were medicine bottles, ice compacts, absorbent cotton, a fever thermometer, and sick room paraphernalia.

Guy was shocked at the thin, haggard face on the pillow. Chew's lips were parted and he breathed through them with a soft, sucking sound. He had on some coarse nightgown which the nurse had put on him, and which fell away from his neck, revealing a sunken place in his throat, with a large cord on either side. Hair grew up to the edge of the depression. He motioned for a drink of water, and the nurse, putting her hand behind the pillow, lifted him up. The depression rose and fell. Guy had a quick vision of Chew as he sat the night of the high-school graduation exercises, swinging his foot and looking complacently over the church. The only similarity to that gay and forceful man were the "bangs." They had grown whiter and thinner, but even now there was something jaunty about them.

"The devil seems to have got me at last," said Chew.

Guy was shocked; it was not what he had expected a sick man to say.

"The old machine is shaking to pieces ——"

"Now, daddy, don't say that. You are going to get well," interrupted Bee.

Chew smiled and reached for her hand, but made no answer.

Guy tried to find something to say, but all that came were interjections and mumbled negatives. His head pounded; if there were only some splendid assurance he could give the sick man.

"It isn't anything new," said Chew. It was diffi-

cult for him to talk; he half whispered, half spoke the words, and as he finished a sentence there was a slight panting. "It has been coming on for a long time. The hard part is to go off and leave Bee. She seems so little now." He swallowed, and an even greater tenderness came into his voice. "Sometimes she seems just like a little kid playing around. I suppose it's the medicine they have been giving me. Life, sooner or later, gets all of us." Bitterness rose up, but in a moment it was gone. "All we can do is to face it and, when the time comes, go out to meet the eternal mystery." He looked at Guy wistfully. "I wish you would do what you could for Bee. It's ——" he choked and swallowed—"it's going to be lonesome for awhile. I know how it was when my mother died. It doesn't seem very long ago. I was thinking about her when you came into the room."

Suddenly Guy felt the briefness of life, caught the swift rush of time.

"Guy"—Chew's thin hand reached out and touched Guy's, "I wonder if your father will come to see me." He spoke eagerly—the depression rose and fell. "Won't you go and ask him for me?"

"I know he'll come," Guy assured him.

At last Guy found himself out of the sick room. The faint odor was gone. He took Bee's hand—now was the time to say something comforting, but he could think of nothing.

"I'll run and tell him," was all he could say.

Guy found his father in the barn. He was mixing his paints, trying his brushes. On the floor, drying, were chairs he had painted; also there were book-

shelves he had stained, odds and ends of small jobs of painting. Prince's stall had been cleared away and now the space was devoted to an automobile. It brought in a small sum each month from a neighbor. A bridle which had belonged to Prince was hanging on a nail. For a time Adrian Plummer kept the bridle oiled and the enameled leather of the blinders bright, but now the bridle was neglected, the enameled leather was seamed with zigzag cracks, and the bit was rusty. Mice had begun to chew the sweated throatlatch. Guy noticed how much older his father looked, how much grayer. He moved more slowly, whispered to himself at his work, lost things easily, had much hunting to do to find them. Names were difficult to remember; he talked about the past more than he did about the present. Often his eyes had "watering spells," as he called them.

At sight of Guy, Adrian Plummer looked up eagerly. He brushed off his hands, tried to make himself presentable.

Guy told him what he wanted.

Adrian Plummer rose; his shoulders straightened; a new light came into his eyes.

"He thinks he is dying and he wants me to come, does he?"

Guy told him that Chew was very ill.

"I'll go."

Usually Adrian Plummer never left until he had put everything to rights, until he had drained the paint brushes and put them in a can of turpentine; but now abruptly he closed the door and started for the house. His old enemy was dying, and when the time came to face the unknown he wanted the grace

and comfort of God. Adrian Plummer moved eagerly, with quickened step—it was as he had foretold. Just as Ingersoll on his deathbed had called to God, so now Chew called.

Mrs. Plummer came lumbering out. "What's the matter?" she asked. Guy explained. She turned to Plummer. "Of course you're not going—those infidels! What have they ever done for us?"

"I am needed," said Plummer, quietly, "and I am going.'

"No, you ain't."

She stood before him, but Plummer pushed on by. She waddled after him and dropped herself on the porch. "O Lord! O Lord!" she moaned. "What next? Help me bear it!" She continued to groan and grunt and sigh, but Plummer paid no attention.

Arranging the pan in the sink he brought the kettle and poured the hot water, and then, taking the soap from its wire rack, began washing at the paint in the hair of his hands. Great bubbles of gray foam rose. He brought more water and, covering his face with it, blew with a sharp bubbling noise. He paused before the mirror and, taking the brush from the tin rack, ran it over his hair and gray burnside. Then he changed into his long black coat; it was now worn and threadbare, but he gave its condition no thought. Something bigger was ahead. Going to the "study," now littered with clothes racks, washboards, and the odds and ends of housekeeping, he opened his desk and took out his old worn Bible. With it under his arm he started down the street. A new confidence showed in his step; again his hand went up in the rough gestures of a salute. He

could be of help to stricken beings; again his coming was welcome—a weary misguided soul was calling for him.

For the first time in his life he turned up the winding drive to the house.

In a moment he was admitted.

The tall, gaunt, slightly stooping figure advanced to the bed. "You have sent for me, brother."

He drew up a chair; his old spirit and manner was upon him. "I am glad to bring you the comfort and grace of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Sickness and suffering are things that must come to us all—it chasteneth the spirit; it maketh us whole; it purifieth the flesh." He continued to hold out the comfort which so many times he had offered. He spoke of "the glorious life" where "there is neither sickness nor suffering," of "the bright angel choir," and of "the heavenly throne." He hovered over him eagerly, his voice was soft and soothing; he took Chew by the hand; there was confidence in his manner. "It is by faith alone that we live," he said, "and when you have faith you never can die. It is the one tie which binds us with the next and greater world." He continued to speak of "heavenly home," "loving Father," "the blood of the Lamb," and "the life everlasting."

Abruptly Chew stopped him, rose up in bed.

"I didn't send for you for any of that stuff," he said, with a rise of his old temper. "Don't get that idea. Just because I am about to the end of my rope doesn't mean that I am getting cold feet. Whatever I am going to face I'll face alone."

Chew dropped back, his hands trembled; a fit of

coughing came over him, while Adrian Plummer stared at him in astonishment. The two old enemies glared at each other.

Chew lay for some moments, panting; the hollow spot in his throat rose and fell. When he spoke, however, it was calmly.

"I sent for you because I wanted to square up with you personally. We were earnest in our hatred, weren't we, Plummer?" He smiled faintly. "I don't know who was right. Maybe neither of us. Some things you can't see the answer for until long after. You saw things from your point of view; I saw them from mine. Maybe the ideas I taught were too liberal—I don't know. It is hard to see one's own mistakes. Man is a groping animal and he dies without knowing whether or not he has gone even in the right direction. You were groping in one direction; I was in another."

Chew stopped to rest. The nurse came in with warnings, but he waved her away.

Adrian Plummer remained impassive for some moments. It was not easy to break down the hate of all the long years, even in this tense moment. But he said no more about the future life. He continued to sit with his Bible open before him on his knees; at last, he put it aside.

"I just wanted you to know that I was doing the best I could from my point of view," continued Chew. "Will you do what you can for Bee? The hard part is going on and leaving her."

Chew's voice filled with emotion; it was the thing nearest his heart. "Will you?"

Adrian Plummer swallowed, then abruptly reached

out his hand. The great thick, brown knuckles, with slight discolorations of paint, seized Chew's slight white hand. The two men looked a moment at each other intently, saying nothing, and then their hands parted. The nurse fluttered in—it was against all rules; she would go off the case. Chew wanted to talk; a sudden eagerness to say more came over him. Adrian Plummer gathered up his worn Bible, but lingered; he, too, wanted to talk. But the nurse was obdurate. In a few moments she had him out of the room.

That night Chew died.

Adrian Plummer put on his rusty suit and went eagerly to the house. There was work he could do. He consulted with the undertaker; he went over the details with Aunt Grace; he sent messages, met people at the door, saw about the flowers, arranged the folding chairs. Considering his size, he moved about easily, his voice was subdued and soft without being mournful; others came to him, asked his opinion, turned to him. Telegrams came from over the state, from different societies and organizations; there were facts to be gathered for the city papers; relatives to be met at the train. He was a general bringing order to confusion.

The day of the funeral came. Chew had said that no sermon was to be preached; his friends should gather and bear the body away.

Guy was surprised to see the new strength and dignity which came to his father. His father took charge of affairs; he moved silently among the relatives, sympathetic, capable. He gave word for the music to begin, for the casket to be opened, and

walked by the side of Bee and Aunt Grace as they moved past the silent, ashy-white face. Sobs arose, the floor creaked, there was the sound of folding chairs being closed. . . . At last the body was carried out; Adrian Plummer was one of the pall bearers. The casket was put on the rollers, pushed forward; the doors of the hearse closed behind it; the brass catch clicked. Adrian Plummer turned to new duties. He assembled the relatives, brought up the cars, walked with Bee to the open door, held her hand a moment. He sent the long line of carriages by, finally himself got into one. He nodded to the undertaker . . . the procession moved forward.

Bee and Aunt Grace were in one carriage, with a relative; Guy found himself, a few carriages to the rear, with a distant member of the Chew family.

At last they returned from the cemetery. Guy felt that he ought to be sad and depressed, but he was not sad or depressed. He was sorry for her father—at moments it seemed wretched, bitterly unfair—but that chapter was over. A new one was beginning. Bee. She had called upon him in her moment of need; the thought returned again and again to his mind. What did it mean? he kept asking himself. Was there hope? When the procession turned a corner he could see her. He began to look forward to the next corner; to wonder if she would glance back, make some slight sign. She did not.

Getting out of the carriage, Bee and Aunt Grace passed into the house. The door closed behind them.

Weeks passed. The intense feeling aroused in Guy by Chew's death began to subside. Guy

returned to the drug store. Occasionally he saw Bee, but only for a moment. Aunt Grace continued to live at the great lone house.

The monotonous round of the days began again.

And then suddenly Junction City was stirred. In Junction City there were many cliques and factions constantly crossing one another, continually pulling back and forth, bickering; but occasionally all personal feeling was forgotten and the town worked together in a spirited and surprising unity. Once it had done so when it had secured the Normal when other towns had contested for it. This state teachers' college was now Junction City's proudest institution. But now a more dazzling opportunity arose. A great automobile road was to be opened from St. Paul to St. Louis. It was to be called "The Saints' Trail." It would be a splendid asset to the town; it would put Junction City on a direct line of communication; bring thousands of tourists and automobile parties each year. And then there was the matter of the mail-order catalogue. More and more, farmers were buying from mail-order catalogues. The small towns in the county were slowly decaying; the stores were being boarded up—the more enterprising farmers were buying them for granaries. Villages were dying out, the towns were getting the trade, and now the larger towns must contest among themselves. With an automobile highway open during winter and during the heavy rains of spring which turned wagon roads into mires, the farmers would come to Junction City to do their "trading" instead of going to rival towns or sending their money away to Chicago. But the other towns in that

section were equally awake; they, too, wanted the Saints' Trail.

The engineers had gone from town to town making their surveys, and now the commissioners were to visit the rival towns and make their decisions.

Enthusiasm in Junction City rose. The town must be shown off at its best. Committees were formed; opposition parties joined; animosities were forgotten. There were clean-up campaigns; weed-mowing contests; graders appeared on the streets; holes were filled in; unsightly lots were cleared off; discarded buggies, carts, crippled sleighs, broken-down milk wagons, and abandoned drays were hauled to the blacksmith shop, the iron taken off, and the wood sold; the water wagons were painted, the dials of the clock on the courthouse were washed, sweepers started down the vitrified-brick paving; there were banquets, speech making, parades, tag days, auctions, church fairs, suppers, veiled queens—the mayor put on a pair of overalls and himself cleaned up a block. Rewards were offered for tin cans. . . . At last the great day came; the commissioners arrived; automobiles emptied themselves and distinguished-looking gentlemen walked about the town, visited the hotels, sampled the meals, examined the garages and the filling stations, studied grade books, but there was doubt. The commissioners were divided. At last they went away and Junction City waited in feverish anxiety. And then it was announced that the commissioners were to meet in St. Louis and there decide the route. Word was sent that the commissioners would hear representatives from the different towns laying claim

to the Trail—one from each town. Again Junction City throbbed with excitement. At this hearing the final word would be given; the representative who made the best impression on the commissioners would be the one to secure the interstate highway.

Chew was gone; he could have the most ably and humorously presented Junction City's side of the case. The committee cast around for some one to represent the town. Guy was the most able one; he was the only one who could give it the fire which would enthuse the commissioners, but Guy had a "bad record." He had done things that no "self-respecting" man would do. He was not the kind of person that Junction City wanted to have represent it. The town was again stirred; it had its hatred and in a small town this is not easily forgotten.

But there was the matter of the Saints' Trail.

Guy continued quietly at his rounds in the drug store. And then one day a committee waited on him. It was made up of Arnhalt, the secretary of the Commercial Club, and one of the preachers—"representative citizens," as they called themselves. The committee was most humble. Would Guy be so good as to give them a few minutes of his valuable time? Arnhalt smiled and rubbed his hands, and then, as spokesman, "refreshened," as he said, Guy's mind on the great benefits to be secured on the part of Junction City by this new highway, the incalculable advantages to be derived from this—ah—artery of a state. "Now we have come to ask you, Mr. Plummer, if you will do something for your town. Will you be a minute man ——"

"A sort of Paul Revere, as it were," said the clergyman, in great good humor with himself.

"—— exactly, and represent Junction City for us before the commissioners? The committee believes that you are the one person to do our little city justice, to present our side of the question in the way it should be presented." Arnhalt fawned upon him, rubbing his hands, being his most engaging.

And then Guy remembered the words Mr. Chew had said on the night of their ride into the country—of the great possibilities which the county had if it had better means of communication with the outside world. His former feeling of intense earnestness about it arose.

"Yes, I'll go."

The committee grasped his hand; they were delighted—Guy was, indeed, a real minute man. They moved Guy's hand up and down in a final token of appreciation; Arnhalt even patted his shoulder. It was a bitter pill, but Arnhalt swallowed it. Finally they went away with many farewells.

Guy's head buzzed; he felt a delicious haziness, as if in some way walking on air. Without giving himself time to think, he rushed to the telephone. Again, as he heard Bee's voice, his heart began to quicken. He told the news excitedly.

"May I come down this evening and spout?" he asked, impetuously.

"Yes," she said at last.

His spirits rose and he began going over his speech. He felt a deep, stirring pleasure. Here was something to do and he was the person to do it.

Wolf approached him. "If you are going to speak mit feelings you yoost go ahead und stop der work until you come back mit der Trail."

There was a snort, a sputter, and a car drew up in front of the store. Harlan Thompson came in. He was in his shirt sleeves and had a cigar clutched in his mouth. A curl of the unburnt wrapper dangled. Since the town had come down upon Guy, Harlan had seen very little of his old friend. He had managed to keep away from him. But now things had changed.

Harlan was a "good business man"—"everything he touched seemed to turn to money," as they said in Junction City. He was a pusher and a hustler. Some day he would be the richest man in town. He was much envied.

"Hello, old sport!" he said. "I hear you have accepted. Well, that's fine! Put 'er there." He pumped Guy's hand. "If anybody can put it over, you can. I was the one who tipped 'em off to you. Sure, I'm right behind you in anything you want to do. I prophesy you'll knock the commissioners cold. Go after 'em—paralyze 'em."

He talked on, from time to time removing the cigar from his mouth to squirt out the smoke.

"Well, I got to be humping," he said at last. "Got in a car of soft pine to-day and I got to jump down and see how they're getting along with the unloading. Then I promised the old woman I'd take her out for a breath of fresh air. Then I got a committee meeting and a lot of other things. It sure keeps a fellow on the run. So long, Guy, old man."

The car sputtered again and he was off.

That evening, as Guy walked down Buchanan Street in the direction of Bee's house, doubt assailed him. Maybe, after all, she didn't want him; he had thrust himself upon her. He began to feel the old awkwardness, the grip of formality. The impetuousness of the telephone conversation was gone.

He rang the bell. Bee herself answered and stood for a moment a slim, entrancing figure in the doorway. Guy's heart beat wildly. The sight of her stirred him.

Guy felt a movement in his throat; he must say something; but there wasn't anything to say.

"Good evening," he gasped out at last. "How are you?"

It was a most prosaic greeting—after all that had passed between them.

"About the same, I suppose," she answered

She led the way to the drawing-room. He tried to find words to say something of consequence, but they did not come. He was ill at ease, moved his feet, gulped.

"You seem to be looking well," he said at last.

"Yes, I feel all right."

"The town's all stirred up over the Saints' Trail thing," he said.

She agreed that it was.

"The cleaning up they have been doing has helped the looks of things," he managed finally to say.

At last he began on his speech. He had the queer vague feeling that he had done this same thing before. And then he remembered that this was the

same room where he had delivered "The Raven." How much had happened since then, the thought flashed over him. And yet how slowly and gradually it had seemed to come on. Was life that way? Did it come bit by bit so that one could hardly recognize the changes until one looked back? He could not recall any one thing which had so changed his life; it had been a succession of small things—and yet he had the quick, clear sense of how much had really happened to him since his baby-party oration. Life was a monotonous succession of little things, rather than a few wonderful events. He was now twenty-eight—almost thirty—and thirty was a fearful age. Once he had looked upon it as being close to old age; now it seemed just the beginning of lfe. He was now sobered; he had learned to weigh values. Life wasn't in getting a brilliant early start—it was too full of pitfalls to count on that; it was in growing, in striving, and in keeping a shining goal ahead.

He finished his speech.

Bee was filled with enthusiasm. "It's good, Guy," she cried. "I didn't know before what a wonderful town Junction City was!"

They began to talk naturally; their tongues were loosened. There was no one Guy could talk to so completely as to Bee, could give himself to, and receive so much from in return. In some way, which he could not express, she seemed some missing part of him. He began to yearn to be near her, to touch her, but now it was a craving for companionship, something less of the flesh and more of the soul. The baby picture was on the table before him;

her chubby legs were still kicking, but he scarcely noticed the once appalling picture. It now seemed impersonal and removed—hardly related to her. In fact, it was cunning.

She sat on the sofa; a few moments later he found himself beside her, he scarcely realized how. They continued to talk, running from subject to subject; there seemed to be no end of subjects. How freshly and quickly her mind reacted to his; how his responded to hers. She was stimulating and yet soothing; she dangled something before him and yet she was sufficient. She brought out something that slumbered in his breast; touched depths which no one else uncovered—depths which he barely knew he had. He felt something quivering in him, something moving in a hidden consciousness that he did not know was his.

Suddenly he again caught a quick picture of Harlan as he stood before him in the store, with the stub of his cigar clutched in his mouth, the curl of unburnt wrapper dangling. He saw Harlan taking "the old woman" out for a ride. Harlan had reached the end of his development; he would always be what he was now. He would make money; there would be a Thompson Block named after him—with a high false front. But the prospect did not stir Guy. There was something bigger in life than being the richest man in town. He couldn't phrase it, couldn't put it into words, but he knew it was there. He continued to grope for it. And then something loosened itself and came up from his hidden depths.

"Bee," he said, "I don't want to be like so many people I see around me—small and picayunish. I

see so much of it on all sides, so many gnarled, dwarfed souls. I'd almost rather die. I want to keep on growing—get something out of life. I want to go into the office with the judge, study law, and take the examinations. I want to go ahead and be somebody—and I want to be somebody right where everybody looked down on me and wanted to kick me. I suppose, in some blind way, that is the reason I have stuck around. I believe it is the American spirit. I believe that about being captain of your own soul—not so much as I used to, but I believe a man can do a lot with it. Do you think I can make something out of myself, Bee?"

Bee was stirred by his appeal; the old Guy she had known had returned. Here was a man in the making. The storms he had been through had proved him. His boyhood ambitions would never be attained, but there was a good work to be done in Junction City. He would rise to a man of power and influence, even to a higher place than her father had occupied.

She took his hand and held it to her cheek. "I believe you can do anything," she said.

They began to work on the speech.

The next day Guy started for St. Louis; it was the first time he had ever gone so far. The station platform was crowded; the hope of the town rested on him and the people wished to display it. Automobiles honked, people laughed and shouted, there were even a few flags in the crowd. The Junction City Uniform Band was out. Feet kept time on the platform; a few of the young couples tried to dance. Persons pushed through the crowd, shook Guy's

hand, tried to shout in his ear. A collection had been taken up and he had been presented, the day before, with an elaborate leather traveling bag—"something appropriate," Arnhalt had said. Laughingly the people came up and hefted it; joked. The baggage man came out and Guy got a glimpse of the room where he had once worked. It was piled with a jumble of boxes, trunks, milk cans, crates, and there were coops with the heads of the chickens showing; they turned their heads from side to side and cackled at the astounding commotion. Guy saw their mouths open, but there was no sound.

The baggage man pumped Guy's hand.

"Good boy, Guy!" he shouted. "Don't worry—you're going to bring it back all right."

Then he thumped Guy on the back and returned to his trucks.

The train came in, while the people looked out the windows in surprise. The crowd pushed forward. Somebody rushed ahead with the new bag; hands beckoned to Guy; a hundred wanted to help him. The conductor waved his hand, the bell began to ring, and Guy looked down into the eyes of Bee at his side. Quickly he bent over and she lifted her lips. Usually at such demonstrations in Junction City there were catcalls, hoots, and sly remarks, but now there was none.

Guy found his way down the aisle. The train started to move and he rushed to the rear platform. He looked back and had the confused picture of handkerchiefs waving, people cheering, hats going up in the air. Over the roar of the train he could hear the honking of the automobiles, like geese

going over. Somewhere a whistle was blowing—blowing—and then he recognized it as being the one at the water works. He began to cry a little. At last the train turned the bend.

THE END

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